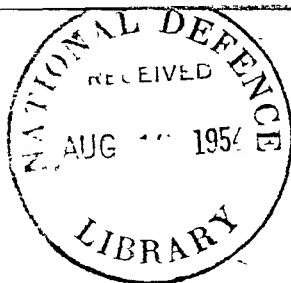


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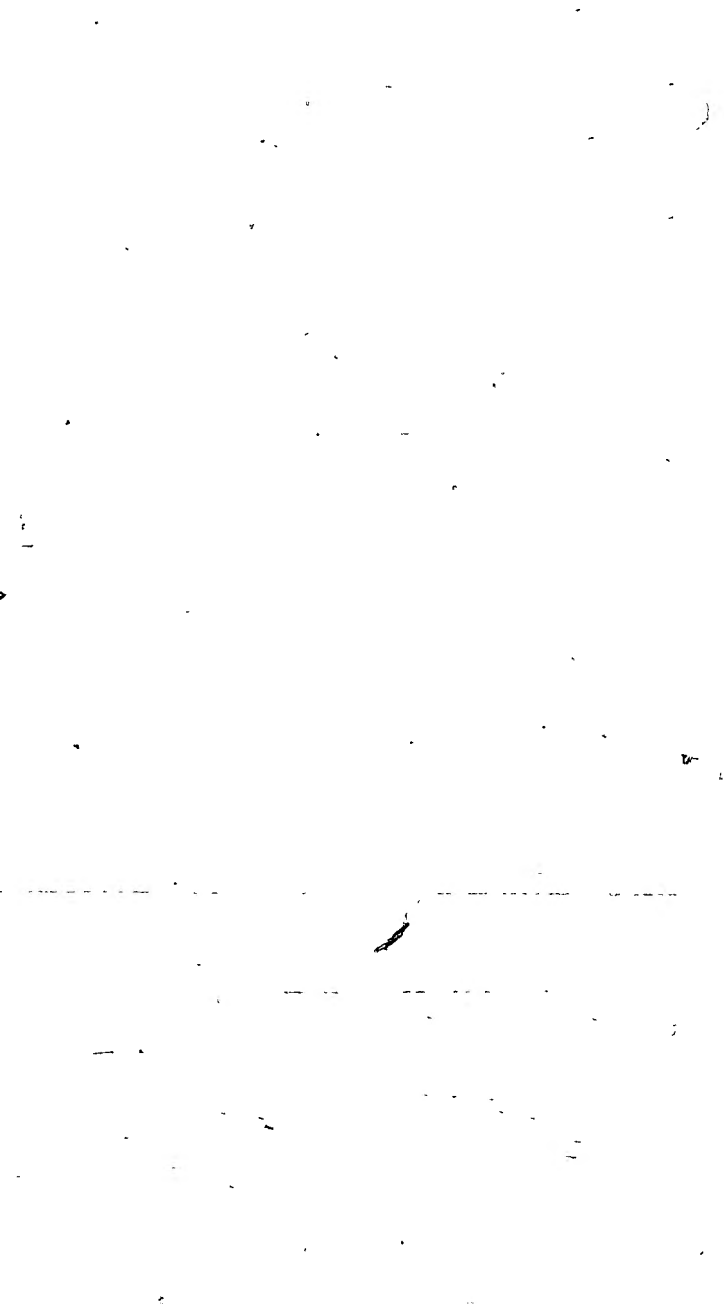


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# VALIANT LA VERENDRYE

BY

IRENE MOORE



# **VALIANT LA VERENDRYE**

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**To E. Fabre Surveyer untiring liaison officer between  
English and French-speaking Canadians.**





## VALIANT LA VERENDRYE

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Grateful acknowledgment is made for information taken from :

Lawrence J. Burpee's The Search For The Western Sea and A Chronicle of La Verendrye and his Sons ;

The Champlain Society's Volume, Journals of La Verendrye, edited by Lawrence J. Burpee ;

Judge L. A. Prud'homme's volume on La Verendrye in the series issued by the Historical Society of St. Boniface ;

The Oregon Historical Society's Quarterly, June, 1925 ;

A. C. Garrioch's First Furrows ;

Alex. Henry's Travels and Adventures in Canada, edited by Jas. Bain ;

D. C. Harvey's articles on La Verendrye in The Beaver ;

Parkman's Half Century of Conflict ;

Bancroft's History of the North-West.



## VERENDRYEAN MEMORIALS

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The Roman Catholic Archiepiscopal Corporation of St. Boniface, July 20, 1911, bought Massacre Island, Lake of the Woods, and on the bare hill surmounting it stands a wooden cross ;

In Three Rivers the street where stood La Verendrye's home bears a tablet with the inscription : " En cet endroit était située la maison où naquit le 17 Nov. 1685 le plus illustre des Trifluviens, Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, Sieur de la Verendrye, le découvreur des Montagnes Rochenses et de l'Ouest Canadien " ;

A fur-traders' monument of stone with La Verendrye's name and the names of other early explorers stands at Fort William, at the end of McTavish street, on the site of Old Fort Kaministiquia ; it was erected by the Thunder Bay Historial Society ;

At Portage La Prairie are the remains of the original La Verendrye Fort ; a national park is being set aside there and a monument is to be erected ;

At the front of the Palais Legislatif, Quebec, is a statue of La Verendrye ;

In the Province of Québec is a village named Varennes ;

Fort Rouge, a residential part of Winnipeg, is named from La Verendrye's old fort ; a statue of the Explorer stands in Winnipeg ; near the same city is a place named Dufrost ; an electoral constituency, La Verendrye, is near Winnipeg ; La Verendrye Street is in St. Boniface ; there is a La Verendrye School in Winnipeg ;

Gaultier Street, in Montreal, took its name from La Verendrye's family ;

Pierre, S. D., was named after the explorer ;

Recently a North Dakota town, formerly, Falsen, was re-named Verendrye ;

A Paxson painting of La Verendrye (an imagined portrait) is in an American State Legislative Building ;

The Verendrye National Monument is a Government Reservation south of Sanish on the Missouri River, Montrail County, North Dakota ; it is a mile square and includes Crow High Mountain from which observations were made by La Verendrye, the first white man to enter what is now North Dakota.

In commemoration of the daring of La Verendrye and later explorers the Upper Missouri Historical Expedition via the Great Northern Railway was organized in 1925.



## CHAPTER I

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### LA VERENDRYE SEEN THROUGH THE YEARS BRIGHTLY

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Champlain, La Salle, La Verendrye !  
What an incomparable trinity of explorers ! For greatness of achievement and for romance of atmosphere they and their times stand out in high relief in the annals of mankind. Flaming imagination, high courage and unconquerable will won for each of them glorious immortality.

—ATHOL MURRAY.

**N**EARLY two centuries have passed since the Sieur de La Verendrye, Discoverer of the western half of the North American Continent, first made the 1600-mile trip by canoe from Montreal to Lake Winnipeg.

Since the days of the enterprising Explorer the wildernesses which he entered braving many dangers have been transformed into cultivated fields and here and there among them centres of commerce have grown up. The silent lakes and rivers which were waterways for his small and frail canoes and for the smaller and frailer canoes of the Indian

tribes no longer offer dangers from hostile voyagers. The continent the Explorer knew but as battle-grounds of savages, with small strips reclaimed by colonies of civilized men, has been organized into important nations.

If the history and traditions that are being woven around the personality and explorations of La Verendrye are treasured as they deserve to be his name will become a household word in the homes of Canada and the United States of America. That the first of the North-West in-comers succeeded in exploring the thousand miles of country between the Great Lakes and the Rocky Mountains with but a handful of men to face the barbarian natives arrests attention. With wonderment over the magnitude of his explorations there is felt, too, a great charm in dwelling on his qualities of mind and heart.

Neither his confreres nor his rivals quite comprehended the splendor of the first North-Westerner's performance. No one in his day could foresee the future importance of the wide new areas into which he penetrated ; and none of his associates could look with complete detachment upon what he was accomplishing nor view it in its right perspective because of their closeness to him. But the centuries have a way of placing men and events in their right relationships to history and the notable figure

of this illustrious son of New France may be seen now in its natural and permanent place among the few who are his compeers ; the richness and extensiveness of the lands he discovered are known ; and there is no longer anything to lose but much to gain by acknowledging his greatness.


To the Canadian who desires to encompass in his thoughts the life of his country as a whole there is a satisfaction in dwelling upon La Verendrye's journals and letters and the other records that remain by which his century may be re-lived in fancy. From such study there evolves the firm belief that Time has now no power to dim the resplendence of La Verendrye's achievement or to assail the loveliness of his character. It seems safe to predict that as long as civilization endures on any continent the memory of La Verendrye will be held in affectionate remembrance. The very nature of the toils by which he won eminence precludes the possibility of his ever being dethroned. With no other continental reaches left to be discovered his explorations cannot be outdone till some new voyager sets foot upon another planet.

In the years since La Verendrye's death there has been full chance for learning if any degree of unworthiness marked his nature. Nothing to his discredit has come to light.



The Governor-General of Canada writing of La Verendrye at the conclusion of his explorations referred to his "six years of service in France and thirty-two in this Colony without reproach", and named him "the man most worthy of the graces of the King". The evidence is now complete and there is no reason to think the Governor-General erred in his estimate.

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## CHAPTER II

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### THE EXPLORER'S KITH AND KIN

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When from Montreal, soon after Cartier had found the place, the sons of sweet France, with hearts as light and buoyant as their little boats, paddled their way far up streams new to European eyes, and with the fearless playfulness of kittens spread their brilliant trinkets before eyes glittering with adoration... no wonder the hard-featured, hard-hearted beastly and bloody grown-up babes of the wood welcomed such companionship.

—BANCROFT'S HISTORY  
OF THE NORTH-WEST.

**P**IERRE GAULTIER de Varennes, Sieur de la Verendrye, was born November 17, 1685, in the strongly fortified town of Three Rivers on the St. Lawrence.

La Verendrye's father was René Gaultier, knight and Sieur de Varennes. He reached Canada in 1665, a lieutenant with the regiment of Carignan. On September 26, 1667, René Gaultier married Marie Boucher, then twelve years old, a daughter of Pierre Boucher who had been raised to the nobility by the King of France because of the distinguished services he gave to Canada.



Pierre Boucher was Governor of Three Rivers. In this position he was succeeded in 1668 by his son-in-law, René Gaultier, who held it till his death 21 years later. The latter was endowed also with the manors of Varennes and Tremblay. Marie Boucher-Gaultier was a woman of exceptionally courageous heart and brilliant mind.

It will be seen that the child born at Three Rivers, November 17, 1685, was an inheritor of all the renown that could accrue through descent from families distinguished among the most aristocratic who came from France to seek fame and fortune on this side of the Atlantic in the morning of time as time is recorded in North American annals. It was not by any whim of fortune that Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, Sieur de la Verendrye, came into possession of the qualities that made him illustrious any more than it is accidental that one sapling becomes an oak and another a cedar.

Pierre was the third youngest child in a family of ten. He was not four years old when his father died on June 4, 1689. The oldest son, Louis, was then sixteen and the youngest but an infant.

The high-hearted Marie-Boucher-Gaultier was left with slender resources, and with so large a brood in her care she knew many



anxious days. The Governor of Three Rivers had drawn a salary of \$240 a year which he supplemented with the help of his older sons by the products of a 40-acre farm and a little fur-trading. His seigneuries had few tenants and brought in very little revenue. The mother divided what property there was among the ten children to be kept in trust for them. The allowance for each was pitifully small. Many a family in the land had a larder more satisfactorily stocked than that of the Varennes. There was need for all members of the family to exert themselves with constant diligence if they were not to know very real and unpatrician hunger. Yet Marie's children possessed as legacy a courtly name and the traditional noblesse oblige attitude of mind.

For forty-one years Marie contrived to manage her finances so thriftily that all went well; but in 1730, when she was seventy-five years old, she found it necessary to ask for a pension. On October 15 of that year the Governor and the Intendant wrote from Canada on her behalf to the minister of Canadian affairs at Versailles stating that La Dame de Varennes, the widow of a former governor of Three Rivers, needed a pension and that they desired it to be given to her. No further mention of the mother of La Verendrye occurs. Whether or not she lived to learn that her son became the Discoverer of the West is

unknown. But even prior to 1730 she had a wealth of proof that his bravery and his sense of honor would never desert him.

Marie's children included twin sons eleven years older than Pierre. One of them married and his descendants are still living. The other became a priest and had the distinction of being appointed vicar-general of Quebec. He died several years before Pierre's career as explorer began. Their oldest brother, Louis, in the year after his father's death was appointed by Frontenac an ensign in France and he later became a captain. He was killed in one of the European campaigns. It was not till after Louis' death in 1707 that Pierre Gaultier de Varennes took the name de la Verendrye which had been that of one of their uncles living in France and was held by Louis alone while he lived.

La Verendrye's favorite sister was Marie Renée who was three years his senior. Marie Renée married Christophe Dufrost de la Jemmeraye when she was nineteen years old. They had a son and a daughter. The son's name was the same as his father's, Christophe Dufrost de la Jemmeraye. Because of his splendid qualities and his extensive explorations carried on north and west of Lake Superior, Canadians of all generations have reason to hold La Jemmeraye the Younger in happy remembrance. With fidelity unsurpassed he

served as lieutenant of his uncle's expedition for the Discovery of the Western Sea and he was the first to give his life while engaged in the fifteen years' quest.

Marie Renée's daughter, Marie-Marguerite, married François Madeline d'Youville. She was widowed early and became the foundress of the Congregation of Sisters of Charity.

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## CHAPTER III

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### LA VERENDRYE'S BIRTH-PLACE

### THE HOME OF ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE

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Oh, but life is strong and us  
Bears with its currents onwards,—us, who fain  
Would linger where our treasures have gone down,  
Though but to mark the ripple on the wave,  
The small disturbing eddies that betray  
The place of shipwreck. Life is strong, and still  
Bears onward to new tasks and sorrows new,  
Whether we will or no.

—TRENCH.

FROM LA VERENDRYE, "le plus illustre des Trifluviens", as a memorial tablet in the town of his birth describes the Explorer, Three Rivers wins reflected glory. Perhaps the name of the place should be bracketed with that of its great son in toasts to his memory for the town, with its distinctive blending of Old and New World atmospheres and with its shadowy dangers lurking ever in the distance had much to do with shaping his destinies. The pictorial French-Canadian settlement at the point where the River St. Maurice flows into the St. Lawrence was a little more than half a century old when Pierre Gaultier was born. For the first hundred



years of its existence it was the most important trading-post in Canada. It was the traditions and legends he heard as a child and the vivid narratives of adventurers who visited Three Rivers that fired the imagination of the youth and resulted in his conceiving a dream of great discovery.

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Three Rivers was founded by the Chevalier de la Violette in 1634 and next to Quebec is the oldest city in Canada. It possessed historic associations even in La Venrendrye's youth. All the great discoverers and missionaries from across the Atlantic who went up the St. Lawrence to push back the frontiers or to join their missions spent some days there before starting on their perilous journeys.

The haze of 150 years did not at all blur the attractiveness of the name of Jacques Cartier, the first white man to visit the site of the present city of Quebec, who came in 1635 and found there an Indian town Stadacona which however was gone when Champlain came to Canada 73 years later.

Champlain, who founded Quebec on his fifth visit to Canada, died in that city on Christmas Day fifty years before La Verendrye was born. History and legend invested him with the attributes most capable of engaging the fancy of Pierre de Varennes and his companions. As a Lieutenant-Governor of New France his fame would have out-lived a century

or two : as a pioneer explorer, in addition to being a statesman, an explorer who had a vastly important performance to his credit, Champlain was an irresistible hero. The youth of that day discerned that seldom were honors better earned than ~~those paid to the memory of Cham-~~plain for when he had first come up the River St. Lawrence barbarians possessed the land and when he died at his post thirty-two years later the environs of the river held an important place in the scheme of civilization.

In 1641, when Three Rivers was but a seven years old settlement, Maisonneuve, soldier and courtier from Paris, and the fifty settlers who came with him to Canada spent a while at that hamlet on their way to the Island of Montreal where they were to build the first dwellings on the site that is now Montreal City. Of such heroic stuff was Maisonneuve made that when advised not to go so far inland because of the treachery of the Iroquois he announced with emphasis that he would not turn back from his missionary enterprise "even if every tree on the Island were an Iroquois."

It was at Three Rivers Fathers Brebœuf, Lalemant, Le Jeune and Daniel, later to be martyred and in the course of time canonized, rested for a time before they commenced their task of Christianizing the savage tribes along the Ottawa and the Georgian Bay. It was from Three Rivers Joliet, Marquette and the

Cavalier de la Salle left on their voyages of discovery through the country bordering along the Father of Waters.

Thirty-three years before La Verendrye was born Three Rivers was ravaged by a band of 200 Iroquois ; and nine years before his birth it was captured by English troops from Boston and held by them three or four months. The atmosphere in which the Explorer-to-be spent his childhood was ringing with tales of adventurous exploits. In the bright, boyish imagination the stories of daring and enterprise took on a golden tinge and till his death at the age of 64 he thrilled at the record of great things ventured for France and Canada. His own achievements were to out-shine those of all but a few explorers. Not more than two or three were his peers.

A trio whose discoveries were known throughout France as well as to all the New World were Etienne Brule, Jean Nicholet and Father Le Caron. Brule, an insouciant coureur du bois, was present at the founding of Quebec and was the first white man to dip paddle in Lake Ontario and in Lake Superior. He married an Algonquin but that did not save him from being done to death by Indians in 1632. Nicholet came from France in 1618 and his wanderings were through the wilds around the Georgian Bay and even as far westward as the site of Sault Ste Marie. Father Le

Caron's concern for the spiritual welfare of the savages led to his discovery of Lake Huron in 1615.

The life of the Sieur de la Salle touched the life and times of La Verendrye still more closely than did the lives of the heroes already named. La Salle was born at Rouen on November 22, 1643, and was killed in Texas on March 20, 1687. It was the year before La Verendrye's birth that La Salle embarked on his last expedition with four vessels and 280 men bound once more for Louisiana and the mouth of the Mississippi. When La Salle's exploits ended with his death in a southern forest by treachery Pierre de Varennes was still in his babyhood. Later, in boldness of imagination, in the magnitude of the task he set himself, and in the fearlessness shown while carrying out his project the Canadian Explorer was to prove a match for the Cavalier from Rouen, though their explorations were in widely divergent directions.

Among the personages with whom the Governor of the most important trading-post in Canada and his family had intimate association was Frontenac, Governor of the French possessions in North America. Born in France in 1620, Frontenac died at Quebec on November 28, 1698, at which time La Verendrye was thirteen years old. Not a Canadian but knew

Frontenac's reputation as an autocrat,—at one period the only officer France had who, as Governor of the French possessions on this continent, could keep in check the Iroquois ; and one who courted favor neither of the Intendant nor of the Jesuit Fathers,—there again was a man about whose personality a boy's imagination had room to play.

Three Rivers was the old home of Radisson, a native of St-Malo, who, along with his sister's husband, Groseilliers, known as Mr. Gooseberry to the English, sought adventure in the direction of the Upper Mississippi. Then the possibilities for fur-trading west of the Great Lakes attracted him, and his star led him later still towards the Hudson's Bay. In the north his discoveries were so extensive and so complete that the direct outcome was the organizing of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1670. There were other and perhaps more special reasons why the deeds of this *coureur du bois* from Three Rivers should haunt the minds of boys in that town. When he was sixteen years old, (it was in 1652), he and two other boys while hunting ducks were carried off by Mohawks. The captors scalped the young Radisson's companions but spared and adopted him because of his show of courage. He was painted red and black and was taught many of the secrets of woodcraft. He was

with the Mohawks several years and he married a squaw. No youth could overlook such a townsman.

Soon after René Gaultier, La Verendrye's father, became Governor of Three Rivers there came to Canada from France the Sieur du Lhut, a member of His Majesty's own bodyguard. This gentleman adventurer and his brother, Sieur de la Tourette, spent thirty years in the service of France among the Red tribes in America, particularly in the region of the Great Lakes, and they were known to the Gaultier family without doubt.

Then there was Jacques de Noyon, a famous Trifluvien. He was seventeen years older than the Discoverer of the West and may have seemed something of a divinity to the members of the generation next to his own. De Noyon lived a picturesque career exploring around the Great Lakes, pushing on as far as Rainy River and Rainy Lake and even to the Lake of the Woods which was considered "beyond whatever was most beyond".

The extraordinary exploit on the Hudson's Bay in which the Sieur D'Iberville won lasting renown by bringing his ship, The Pelican, through a terrific fight with three English vessels was enacted when Pierre de Varennes was twelve years old. When the account of the events of that deathless day in 1697 reached

D'Iberville's countrymen on the St. Lawrence, the hearts of old and young must have thrilled though it was an age of chivalric deeds.

The celebrated adventurers named by no means make up the complete tale of marvellous personages who were unrolling the map of the new and wonderful continent and whose explorations were talked of in all the homes in the Colony and even in the salons of France. They and the entire constellation of explorer-luminaries lived, in youthful fancies, amid the pictorial settings of buccaneers.

Even though the days were those of sailing-ships when the voyage across the Atlantic might take anywhere from five weeks to seventeen, according to the wind's will, nevertheless France kept in close touch with the fortresses on the St. Lawrence. Because greater numbers were needed on this side of the ocean if the men of New France were ever to feel secure from Indian alarms and able to restrict the English settlements to their strip along the seaboard warmth of welcome awaited all who came from France to taste the vigor of life in the New World. Almost as much pride was felt in the achievements of the adventurers who came from France as in those of the Canadian-born, but the latter had a facility in dealing with the Red tribes never quite matched by others.

The young Pierre possessed the advantages of spending his early years in the bracing northern climate and of watching the ways of savages, voyageurs and coureurs du bois from the time when he was too young to care what was beyond the sparkling waves of the St. Lawrence or the St. Maurice. Belonging in official circles he had the additional and important advantage of the opportunity to make acquaintanceship with those who came from France to Canada either to fill government positions or to exchange life amid conventional surroundings for the freedom of the wilderness. In short, Three Rivers was precisely the most fortunate place in which a youth could live if he wished to breathe the same air as explorers, to learn the lore of high adventure and to win renown when older by discovering new continents and oceans.

Visitors to Three Rivers trying to charm back into imagination the life of La Verendrye as a boy revel in the beauty of Shawinigan Falls, a few miles up the St. Maurice River, with its tumbling waters ceaselessly summer after summer and century after century hurrying to the ocean. The wonder of the Falls and the eternal roaring of the waters many a time allured the Varennes family to make trips in that direction particularly at the season of the ripening of wild fruits. An edge to the outing was always lent by the



knowledge that a band of the treacherous Iroquois might come stalking through the woods unannounced.

Another landmark, one that was forty years old at the time of Pierre's birth, was the Forges of St. Maurice. The ruins of the Old Forges seven miles from Trois-Rivières may still be seen. Established in 1745, the Old Forges used to make bullets for the French in their wars against the English when France was in possession of the colonies along the St. Lawrence, and in turn for the English to use against the French when England governed there. The River St. Maurice received its name from Maurice Poulin, the first owner of The Forges.

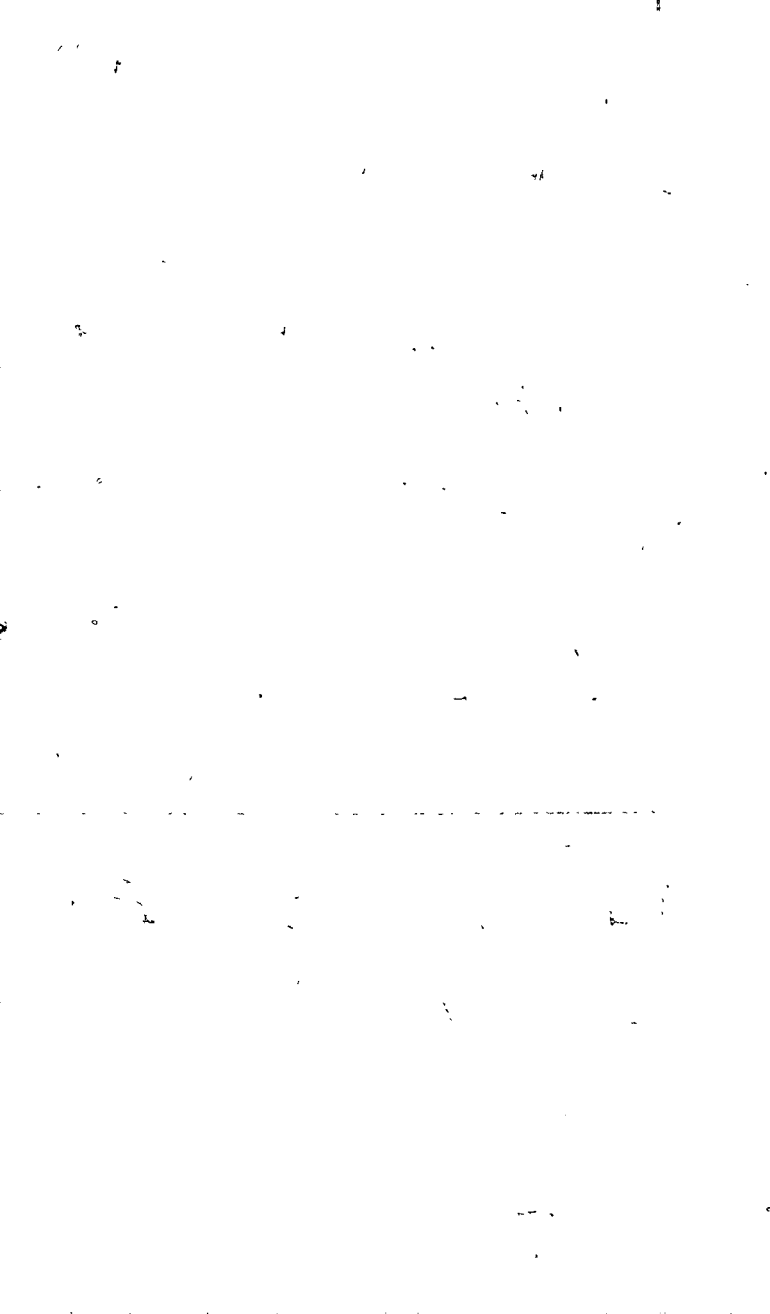
A third link with the lifetime of La Verendrye is found at Three Rivers. It is the National Shrine of the Holy Virgin in Canada, the church at Cap-de-la-Madeline, a couple of miles below the St. Maurice on the banks of the St. Lawrence. The church was built in 1714 and its main altar of carved wood was brought from France before 1700. Pilgrimages are still made to this sanctuary as in Verendryean years.

The Recollet monks and the Ursuline nuns were established at Three Rivers before 1700. Father Le Caron, Recollet, celebrated the first mass in Three Rivers on July 25, 1615. The Ursulines went to Three Rivers in 1697 from

the convent at Quebec where already they had been caring for the sick and educating the girls of the Colony for 81 years.

Even while the English were in possession of Three Rivers the Ursuline Sisters stayed at their hospital and cared for the sick of the garrison. It is recorded by a French notary that he was asked by the Sisters to collect from the troops money owing for the nursing of officers and men from autumn till spring. The English commandant instructed the notary to tell the Sisters he could not pay them as no money had arrived. The notary said it would be impossible for the Sisters to go on looking after his sick men. But the English commandant's reply was, "Tell them to have patience and they will be paid!" "Very well", retorted the notary, "I will tell these ladies to feed your soldiers with patience and you will see how fat they will get!"

One lingers over these associations feeling the magic of the years and the surroundings that shaped the mind and body of La Verendrye for a role so heroically played that his memory is cherished by even more thousands than those to whom the great tracts of land he explored will offer homes when brought completely under cultivation.



## CHAPTER IV

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### ENTHRALLED BY A DREAM

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*Dreams ! What are they ?*

Creations of the mind ? The mind can make  
Substance, and people planets of its own  
With beings brighter than have been, and give  
A breath to forms which can outlive all flesh.

—BYRON.

**I**N A MANNER as indefinable as that by which a veil of mist takes shape where before was transparency the impression was forming in men's minds that the hinterlands west of the Great Lakes must end at a seaboard. By imperceptible degrees travellers were growing accustomed to the theory that the earth was round, and the conviction kept gathering that if the region of lakes and forests could be penetrated to its furthest and most shadowy confines there would be found an ocean whose other border was against the oriental lands.

Indians from afar brought tales of other tribes still more remote who knew of salt water, "water too bitter to drink" was the way they described it. They relayed, too, rumours of rivers flowing upstream at certain hours,

(when the tide was coming in). From the end of the fifteenth century repeated efforts had been made by the bolder men of many a European nation to find some westerly way to India and China. Each failure only confirmed the general belief that with fortunes a little more sizeable, weather a little more trustworthy and adventurers a little more fearless the road through the American Continent and across the fabled Western Sea to the land of far Cathay would yet be found.

The bright spirit of the young La Verendrye became enthralled by the splendor of a dream. Why might it not be he who would find the Western Sea that was in all men's thoughts and that was going to mean so much to Canada and France ! What other occupation half so appealing could be found as leading a band of explorers on the glorious, gay emprise, the search for an elusive and illimitable ocean ? Deer-stalking was for the savage ; fighting for the unimaginative ; agriculture could be carried on after all the continents and oceans had been found. For himself, he would reach the Western Sea, if a Western Sea there was, and after that would ask no more of life."

From the time he was about fourteen years of age Pierre's thoughts centred about his purpose of becoming the Discoverer of La Mer de l'Ouest. Month after month the dazzling project haunted the mind of the young Cana-

dian till his visions of a life of exploration seemed to take on the substance of reality. Without being hurried or forced his decision to lead an expedition westward fell within permanent outlines and became a part of his nature. Its presence was accepted unquestioningly.

Much of what the cost would be if he chose the life of an explorer La Verendrye knew. He had listened with his mind alert in the long winter evenings to the stories told by officers within the old fortifications of Trois-Rivières of the men who had discovered Quebec, Lake Huron, the Mississippi, the Hudson's Bay. Much of what the reward of successful exploration would be he knew, too. He could understand the tone of deference in which men spoke of Cartier, Champlain, La Salle. For the rest, his glowing imagination told him how thrilling beyond all description it would be to gaze the first of white men out across an ocean that till then lived only in men's desires. As if the proposal to penetrate the mysterious western wilds had been a crystal-gazer's sphere he turned it over and over a hundred times a day studying its features through long, thoughtful hours.

In all conscience La Verendrye had time enough in which to meditate on his project and shape its contours to fit the practical possibilities in so far as these could be foreseen. From

the time of his conception of the idea when he was fourteen years old it was to be thirty years before he was actually bound for the western rim of the world. In all that time every fair blue morning sky reminded him of the azure sea that beckoned and every unclouded sunset was a fresh summons to him to follow the golden sphere till he should see it sinking into Le Mer de l'Ouest.

Where the sanction of society was taken as a serious consideration there were not many avenues open for young men of high birth and small fortune in France. To win distinction there it was almost essential to join the army. But in Canada a Frenchman of versatility and ready resource might have a glamorous life of travel and change with the likelihood of adventure in plenty by undertaking to learn the secrets of the fur-trade and the craftsmanship required for the weeks spent in the woods and on the water-ways.

Montreal and Three Rivers offered advantages over all other settlements for fortune-seekers in the fur-trade. They were the centres of transactions between the French and the copper-colored natives. Even Old Quebec, the capital, was less important commercially than the cities further up the river and thus within easier reach of the north-west tribes, the least desultory of the hunters and trappers.

Pierre de Varennes early became familiar with the methods of exchanging merchandise with the Indians. What was of still more importance for one who hoped to discover a western sea, he drew from his most intelligent trapper - acquaintances, through interpreters, accounts of life in the stretches of wilderness leagues away where their hunting and trapping preserves were found. But for a time his knowledge of the commerce carried on over the Canadian lakes and rivers was not put into practical use for at an age when youths in less frontier-like settlements are still in public school the future Explorer joined the army as a cadet and military service began in earnest for him when he was still under twenty years of age.

The processes by which the young officer's body was hardened for the long tests of endurance he would know commenced when he was sent to Montreal to join an expedition of French soldiers and their Indian allies against an English settlement between 300 and 400 miles to the south. Deerfield, in Massachusetts, was the enemy fort selected for attack just then in connection with the long struggle between the French and the English for supremacy in America. During this weary mid - winter march on snow-shoes the troops ran short of provisions. No doubt it was of frequent occurrence to have the supplies exhausted



during warfare carried on under such conditions as prevailed in the New World. But that La Verendrye and his comrades knew hunger on the Deerfield expedition seems to take on a special significance as foreshadowing later years in the far West when many times the Explorer and his companions were to find themselves in danger of starvation through no fault of their own.

Experiences that strengthened La Verendrye's resolution to exchange the military life for one of exploration were lived through in the seven weeks of severe hardship during which guerilla warfare was carried on. The siege ended with the capture of a few of the English, (men, women and children), on a night of bitter cold when no one guarded the little village. Of the twenty killed outright some were women and children ; among the prisoners who died of exhaustion on the long march northward to the fort on the St. Lawrence were women and children. The whole proceeding was not calculated to make a youth with a lively sense of the heroic enamoured of intersettlement battles. To win territory by taming the savages appealed to him as an infinitely more honourable thing than to secure it by killing defenceless pioneers of his own color.

A year or so after the rather profitless expedition to the Deerfield Colony Pierre was

a member of a small force of French-Canadians sent to Newfoundland to take the English Settlement of St. John's. The place proved to be strongly fortified. The attacking soldiery had ill fortune in their siege and they retreated to the nearest French village. On the way back from St John's the young Trifluvien whose thoughts kept wandering from the Atlantic across the continent to the unknown Pacific again had to witness what must have looked to him like unsoldierly business,—the burning of the homes of families of English fishermen along the Coast.

La Verendrye had no stomach for such revolting sort of warfare. There was none too much sentiment expended on untitled women in that soi-disant age of chivalry, yet one clear-eyed cadet saw there was not even mimic glory attached to butchering them. Keenest of intellect among the younger generation in Canada,—and where was there a young generation with less of the decadent?—La Verendrye was well aware of the futility of warring upon unembattled women and children. With almost a whole new continent-wilderness to be reclaimed from pagans, imbecility could go no further, he thought, than for the few hundred civilized French and English in all the great lonely land to busy themselves in killing each other's wives and babies. Compared with such stupidities how

bright was his dream of wresting its secrets from the country beyond the Great Lakes and planting on virginal land his loved lilies of France !

The Discoverer-to-be came into possession of the Tremblay seigneurie, the estate next to that of Varennes, on July 1, 1707, and on November 9 of the same year he signed his marriage settlement with his future bride. But the wedding did not take place till October 29, 1712, for La Verendrye had to leave for France a few days after the betrothal was arranged.

The War of the Spanish Succession had broken out in Europe, and as a patriotic subject of the French king, and a soldier trained and experienced, La Verendrye went across the Atlantic to offer his services. While on the ocean his thoughts alternated between hopes and fears. The racking uncertainties of war could not be put out of his mind. It was impossible to tell how this unexpected turn in his affairs would affect the chivalrous enterprise he dreamed of directing for the glory of La Belle France and Canada,—Canada whose beauty in the evenshine was beyond expressing. He turned over in his mind arguments in favor of his project deciding how best they might be presented to those in France who could make it possible for him to realize his dream. He would need financial assistance from the government treasury in fitting out a fleet of

canoes that could hope to hold its own among the barbarian tribes whose lodges bordered the unknown lakes and rivers of the West.

Once in France, wherever his thoughts were, La Verendrye bore himself gallantly in the Bretagne Regiment of the Grenadiers and he brought his three years services in France to a brilliant climax at the Battle of Malplaquet where he won the rank of lieutenant. But the magnificent dash and elan with which he fought on that field came near to being his no more. With eight sabre gashes and a bullet wound he was left for dead on the battlefield. Happily for America, the phantom fighter Death had to reckon with one accustomed to the invigorating life of the north. Long winter days on snowshoe marches and health-giving summer nights on balsam beds open to the sky helped the Canadian win his own subsidiary fight after Malplaquet. Firm determination was a factor, too : with the sparkling waves of a still undiscovered Western Sea beating in his brain it was not to be thought of that his career should end on however renowned a battlefield in Europe.

While putting in the next fifteen months as a prisoner of war La Verendrye cherished his dream of a blue sea that was to be his own discovery, and with it thoughts of his promised bride, Marie - Anne Dandonneau du Sablé, awaiting him at her home on the St. Lawrence.

The year 1711 saw La Verendrye back in Canada. It is conceivable that on his leaving France more than minor commotion was created in the fair bosoms of whatever Frenchwomen had had the fortune of meeting the tall, lean Grenadier from Canada, bronzed as an Iroquois and with something of the same smooth, swift movements. An air of his thoughts being thousands of miles from the intrigues of European courts and the wars of European armies did not detract from his power to arouse interest. Though La Verendrye was to re-visit France on only one occasion yet his achievements in the New World were to keep his name from being forgotten in the salons of the Louvre.

Long wars were emptying rapidly the French militia coffers and Louis The Fourteenth was not able to confirm the promotions made after Malplaquet. Even the cadet certificate La Verendrye had won earlier in Canada was cancelled for financial reasons. Madame de Vaudreuil, the wife of the Governor of Canada at that date, was in France at the time La Verendrye was leaving for home and it was only through her good graces he was able to return to Canada with an ensign's commission. That recognition of military service performed with fidelity seems not to have been accompanied by a corresponding salary for on February 15, 1712, the Chevalier

de la Verendrye, lieutenant in the Regiment of Bretagne, wrote from Canada to the Minister in charge of affairs in the American Colonies asking to be granted an enseigncy in the infantry troops kept by his Majesty in Canada, and offering to raise recruits for service there. The following qualifications were listed : That he was a native of Canada ; that his father died in Canada as Governor of Three Rivers ; that his brother, Captain Louis de la Verendrye, was killed in the service of His Majesty in France ; that an uncle died as Governor of Charlon in Luxembourg ; that he himself had served in the campaigns in Canada during three years, and in France for three years, winning the rank of lieutenant at the Battle of Malplaquet ; and that he had undergone heavy losses in his years of military service. There were attached copies of his service certificates from the lieutenant-general, from the quartermaster, from the Governor of Canada, and from the Colonel of the Bretagne Regiment.

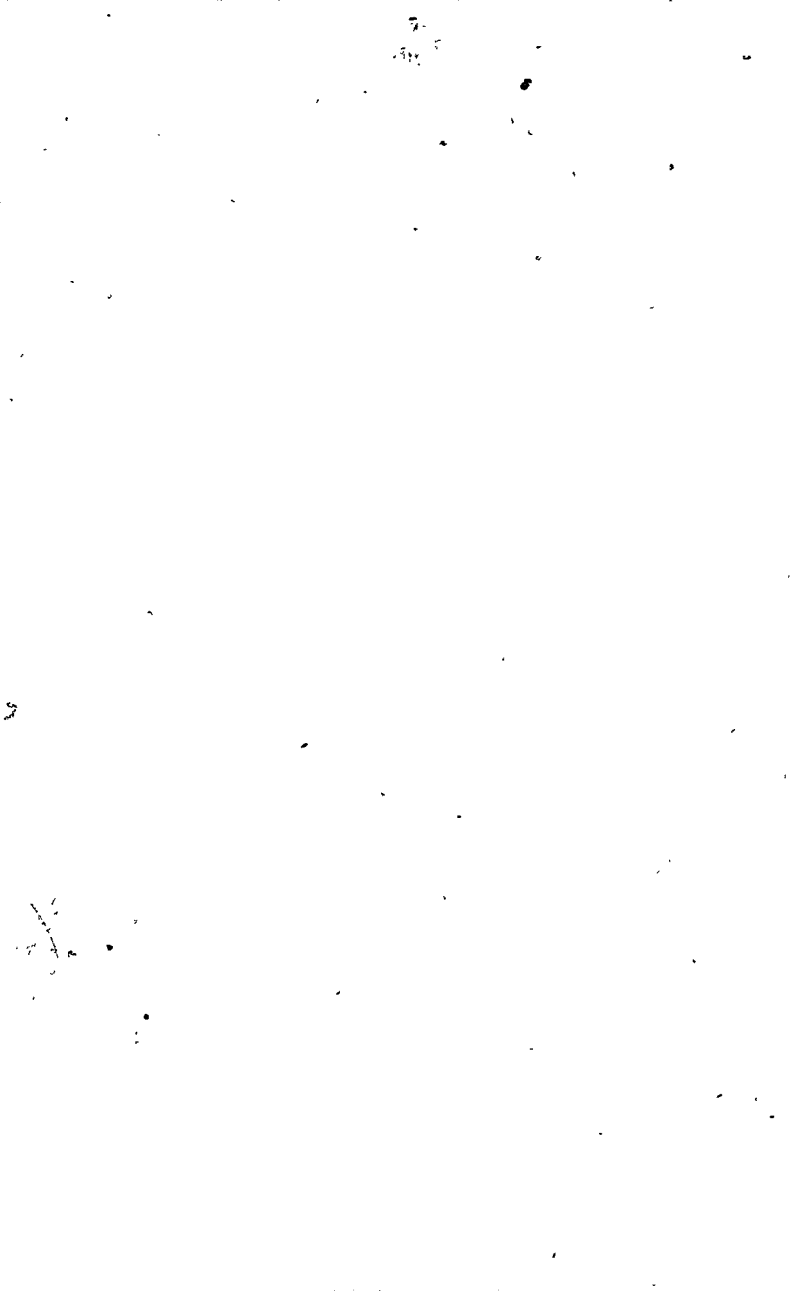
La Verendrye's request did not win the response for which he hoped but it must not be assumed that the French Court habitually ignored Canadian questions. Louis The Fourteenth, the Grand Monarch, felt deeply interested in Canada, though not from motives particularly flattering to that young land. To him the towns along the St Lawrence represented convenient bases from which to handle

troops in his efforts to dislodge the English from America. His worrying of the English colonists on this side of the Atlantic was kept up on the general principle of waging hostilities with a traditional enemy wherever it was met rather than that he possessed any prophetic conception of the greatness that might be achieved through expansion of the American Colonies. Even in his most contemplative hours he did not recognize in North America a continent capable of adding untold wealth and power to whatever nations were forceful enough to subdue the barbarian tribes, cultivate the boundless meadows, and wrest from the forests, mines and lakes the fortunes imprisoned there. The bare suggestion that the statesmen, the litterateurs, the financiers of the New World would one day be famed among all the nations that seventeenth century Europe knew would have been treated as an absurdity. What smiles of skepticism would have overspread the royal countenance if the seers of the realm had told the King that in 250 years Canada would have reached third place among gold-producing countries, and that in extensiveness and for the quality of grain the wheat-fields of Canada would stand unrivalled in the world ! But Canada even at its most primitive could help King Louis confound his enemies and so he administered it as a Royal Province and sent able and aggressive men to govern

it. Through these officials and the entourage of each of them and through the adventurously inclined who came seeking they scarce knew what the strip of land on each side of the St Lawrence absorbed from France much of the essence of her civilization.

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## CHAPTER V

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### LIFE AT LA GABELLE

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From grey of dusk the veils unfold  
To pearl and amethyst and gold—  
Thus is the new Day woven and spun;  
From glory of blue to rainbow-spray,  
From sunset-gold to violet-grey—  
Thus is the restful Night re-won.

—FIONA MACLEOD.

**P**IERRE GAULTIER de Varennes de la Verendrye and Marie-Anne Dandonneau du Sable were married at Quebec on October 29, 1712, and for the next twelve years or more they resided at l'Ile du Pas, near Three Rivers, both interested in the work of colonization.

Marie-Anne's father was a military officer, Louis-Adrien Dandonneau, Sieur du Sable. In 1653, at the age of 31, he had married Marguerite Lenoir and they lived at Champlain, later moving to Lac St Pierre. The Sieur du Sable became Seigneur of the fief du Sable, and of Iles de l'Aigle, St Pierre and du Pas. His father, Pierre Dandonneau, had established

himself at Three Rivers where in 1653 he married Françoise Jobin, a daughter of Normandy.

Pierre, Marie-Anne's grand-father, was one of the earliest concessionnaires in the Champlain parish. He had ten daughters and two sons. One of the daughters, Françoise-Marguerite became a religieuse of the Congregation of Notre-Dame. This nun, (an aunt of Marie-Anne's), took the name Sister Appoline.

By the irony of fate, soon after his marriage La Verendrye received notice that his salary as a military officer was being stopped. The French Government was making further retrenchment in expenditure. This announcement was a disappointing reply to the officer's application for an enseigncy.

Obtaining a concession from the Marquis de Vaudreuil, the Governor of Canada, La Verendrye commenced a fur-trading business at La Gabelle by the St Maurice. A little treasure in the archives of Quebec is an Ordonnance dated July 11, 1713, issued by the Intendant Begon, forbidding any hunter to trespass on the demesne of the Sieur de la Verendrye. The penalty was to be a fine of 100 livres and the confiscation of the arms of the intruding hunter.

Back in his native element, and definitely thrown on his own resources, (though in the

service of France as a concessionaire), with nothing to hope for at the time from the Army in consideration of his half-dozen years of fighting and his severe wounds, La Verendrye now centred his interests in his home, in his business at the trading-post, and in making preparations to penetrate as soon as he could find the means into the unknown reaches beyond the Great Lakes. In these peaceful, happy years he brought to perfection his knowledge of the hunter's craft and courted acquaintance with all the tribes of Indians who came to his post with their furs. His association with voyageurs and coureurs du bois was of more than momentary value to him for it helped equip him to carry through his future explorations to such a depth into the continent that not for fifty years afterwards did any explorer go beyond the westernmost point touched by his expedition.

Four sons and two daughters brought life and gaiety to the modest little La Verendrye home. All four sons were destined to share in the immortality of their father as joint discoverers with him of the western half of the continent. Their names were Jean-Baptiste, Pierre Gaultier, François and Louis-Joseph. Their sisters were named Catherine and Marie-Anne.

La Verendrye's purpose to find the Western Ocean grew stronger each year. His

reading was now altogether of the travels of traders, missionaries and adventurers. The young prattlers in his home were prefigured in his thoughts as companions in his adventures-to-be, and he never wearied telling them of the brave exploits and hair's-breadth escapes of the explorers from the time of Ericson and Columbus down to that of Frontenac and La Salle. It enchanted the father to see their eyes sparkle as they re-lived the rencontres of grizzled explorers with animals of the forest and natives scarcely less fearsome.

When Dame Fortune should permit his own explorations to get under way La Verendrye knew they must be carried on in workmanlike fashion and so he schooled his sons diligently in forest-craft and in the ways of winning the confidence and friendship of the Red tribes of the forest. He held back from his young listeners no phase of the dangers accompanying voyages made through uncharted grounds. He desired to impress on their minds the seriousness of results that might follow from their making the slightest blunder. As illustration he told them of an act of thoughtlessness on the part of the great Champlain that nearly cost him his life. Though his adventurous days had ended a century and a quarter before, Champlain's glory and courage were a flaming tradition and La Verendrye's sons knew his greatness and as soon would they

have thought of their own father making a mistake as of Champlain doing so. The incident their father took care should stay in their minds was this : Champlain was with a deer-hunting party in the dense Ontario woods ; a strange and beautiful bird struck his attention and he turned to follow the fascinating, feathered creature ; when he remembered the danger of getting separated from his friends he could not find them ; deeper and deeper into the woods he got and it was two days before he caught sight of a spiral of smoke from a camp-fire curling above the tree-tops.

La Verendrye himself had been seven years old at the time the fourteen-years-old Madeline-de Vercheres enacted her storied week of dauntless bravery at her father's fort twenty miles from Montreal, warding off the attacking Iroquois by clever deception and sheer courage till troops came. There is no doubt but the tale of Madeline's heroism helped fire the valour of La Verendrye's sons, added to his own example of endurance and fortitude. They became fearlessness itself in facing whatever dangers were held by the Canadian hinterlands.

As the little brood grew older and the expenses of the home increased it was not easy to make the income from the La Gabelle trading-post keep pace with the needs. When Jean-Baptiste, the oldest, was thirteen La Verendrye made a trip to France in the hope

of having his commission as lieutenant endorsed. But as he found earlier, and was to find many a time later, expectations of advancement from the French Monarch or Court or of financial encouragement for his cherished project were doomed to end in disappointment. He hastened home, remorseful over the time spent on the voyage, and plunged again into his fur-trading business, desperately concerned that it should yield enough for the support of his family with something of a margin each year that his rosy dream need not take flight.

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## CHAPTER VI

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### FUR-TRADING ON LAKE NIPIGON

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We pitch our tents on the soft green sward,  
And we light our evening fire,  
And we mingle strains of our Northern land  
With the notes of the forest choir.  
Time flies along with jest and song,  
For our merry men are there ;  
Oh, there's not a life  
In this world of strife  
Like that of a Voyageur.

—JOHN F. MCDONNELL,

"The Voyageur's Song".

THE NORTH-WEST as a promising source of valuable furs was discussed much at the La Verendrye home for relatives on both sides of the family were among the most successful of the French who were making trips to settlements along the Ottawa River and Lakes Huron and Michigan. Every fresh home-coming of one of these relatives lent encouragement to the head of the little household to hope that his efforts, too, would end in happy fulfilment when the time came that he could set out to find the Western Ocean. From each of the returning travellers he secured whatever fresh knowledge of water-



ways and portages, and customs and temperaments of the native tribes the most recent trip had furnished.

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With the valuable explorations made by three kinsmen of La Verendrye's among the Sioux the Governor of Canada, now the Marquis de Beauharnois, was familiar, and with the ease and cleverness with which all his connections won over the natives of one tribe or another. So in 1727 when the Governor needed a resourceful manager for the three trading-posts around Lake Nipigon, one who knew the business well and could keep on amiable terms with the gatherers of beaver-skins, it was La Verendrye whom he selected.

As Lake Nipigon lay in the charmed north-west direction the offer of this appointment seemed heaven-sent. The posts of which La Verendrye was to take command had been built by Du Lhut's brother, the Sieur de la Tourette, years before, (two of them before La Verendrye was born, and the third in 1686). Of all the French forts they were the nearest to the English trading-places on the Hudson's Bay.

The ambition of the Governor of Canada and of the merchants at Montreal and Three Rivers was to have their traders out-rival the English traders in popularity with the Indian hunters and trappers. The rivalry between the English dealers in beaver-skins and the French

went to great lengths. But however keenly the diamond-cut-diamond policy was carried out between themselves in the effort to capture the patronage of the Indians, neither the English nor the French traders in the west stooped to incite the savages against their rivals. La Verendrye successfully used all fair means of intercepting furs that formerly went to the English at the Bay, but when tribesmen from near his forts did have occasion to go to the Hudson's Bay posts the messages they carried were his compliments to the English.

At Lake Nipigon La Verendrye was at the gateway of the Golden West that was to become his by virtue of discovery and of which he was to take possession in the name of the King of France. The next few years were to prove that the choice of commandant for these distant posts had been admirably made. The gifts which the members of the Administration attributed to him were brought into play and others just as valuable which at the first blush were unappreciated. At the same time La Verendrye's plans to go prospecting for a lost ocean were advanced by his exchanging his comparatively secure place of business at La Gabelle near his birthplace, Three Rivers, for the lonely and far distant posts north of Lake Superior where the next three or four years of his life were to be spent.



As commander of trade and commerce in the territory between the Great Lakes and the most northerly boundary he chose to set, La Verendrye made his services invaluable. His initiative in making the acquaintance of the copper-colored half-naked savages, his conciliatory manner in dealing with them, his unwearied study of the waterways and trade-routes,—these were enough to make him all but indispensable to his vice-regal employer. One wishes there were records to show that the vice-regal employer recognized at this period that his representative at the furthest outposts of his dominions possessed particularly rare qualities. That a man destined to be one of the three most eminent of New World explorers, a man with an unfound sea pounding away against his consciousness unceasingly, at the age of 42 or 43 still should be selling beads and blankets to vermilion-painted pagans and buying beaver and otter-skins for a rapacious government treasury,—the thing was monstrous.

Fur-trading under the French regime was permitted only to those named by the Government. Supplies of the blankets, beads, flintlocks, coins, kettles, molasses, axes and other articles desired by the Indians were furnished by the merchants only to those who held licenses or concessions for fur-trading, (except for a good deal of illicit bargaining that went

on unchecked). The Government, and too often its chief representative at Quebec, had small sentiment for the prosperity of colonists so far away from the French capital, and it seems to have been merciless in its bargainings with the concessionaires. A record from the year 1662 says : "The fur trade was good in this year and the French loaded 300 canoes with furs ; on arrival at Quebec they were valued at \$300,000. Yet when the Governor got through they had less than \$20,000 left for themselves".

Plenty of mischances lay in hiding to keep a timorous trader in constant anxiety about his ledger-balance. When allowance did not have to be made for paddlers losing their road and having delays, and when accidents on rapids and portages did not befall the canoes, there was always the unreliable disposition of the Indians to be taken into consideration. Almost as undependable as the winds, the Red folk knew no commercial law but necessity. If a tribe found itself reasonably sure of getting through a season comfortably without demeaning itself by adopting a hunting and trapping schedule, so much the happier its members, and so much the less fortunate the Palefaces.

A financial crisis for the traders was threatened in the year in which La Verendrye went to Lake Nipigon by a new regulation put into force by the French Government. It had

been discovered by the Governor that many of the French voyageurs and coureurs du bois were in the habit of getting from New York their articles for trade with the Indians. In the French Colonies only a few merchants were allowed to handle the merchandise of this sort and they kept the prices very high. Goods were brought from France spasmodically and the ocean-rates made excuse enough for the merchants to sell their wares at unconscionable figures. To evade paying so dearly for their goods the traders would buy English things when they could. In 1727 a French ruling was put into force forbidding goods to be brought from New York to New France. Some of the traders were forced out of business by the new restrictions, and for all they worked a hardship.

If the Indians had not been veritable babes in the woods they would have observed the difference in values between what they sold and what they got in return. In his History of Western Canada H. A. Kennedy quotes a price-list dated about five years after La Verendrye went to Lake Nipigon. For more than a century everything west of the Ottawa River was priced in beaver skins. This list shows that one beaver would buy at the time a brass kettle or twelve ounces of colored beads, a pound and a half of gun-powder or two pounds of sugar, two combs or twelve needles, a pair of shoes or two looking-glasses, eight

knives or two hatchets. If the Indian asked the price of a blanket he was told "Six beaver". He could get a gallon of brandy for four beaver. He paid ten or twelve beaver for a gun, four for a pistol, three for a pair of breeches or two handkerchiefs. It seems small wonder that the relationships between the new-comers and the collectors of beaver-skins at times grew strained.

But whatever difficulties beset the fur-trade its appeal and charm could not be denied. Whether the odds were in favor of making fortunes or losing them the life was crammed with variety and interest and freedom. Fur-trading had flourished for a century before explorers grew curious enough about the North-West to penetrate the woods beyond the Great Lakes. Before 1600 Hakluyt described how "Divers beastes' skynnes, as bevers, otters, martens, lucernes, seales, buffs, dere skynnes, all dressed and painted on the under sides with divers excellent colours, were brought from within the graunde baye (of the St Lawrence)." But the fortune-seeking voyageur and coureur du bois were in their golden prime when the fastnesses to the westward began to be opened up. The labyrinth of lakes and rivers between Lake Superior and the prairie furnished myriads of peltries to the adventurous.

Among the French dealers of La Verendrye's time those whose bent was towards establishing a permanent business and making a wide allowance for home life and living in safety to a ripe old age had their centres well within the colony confines and handled there the merchandise that was brought from mysterious inland places by hunters and trappers. But the young and restless scions of the patrician families from Paris did not approve of the idea of letting the native tribesmen have all the excursions and the adventures, and they fitted themselves out with canoes and camp-kits. Besides having the purpose of giving a wide berth to whatever in life was irksome these young adventurers had also the ambition of drumming up more trade by themselves following the rivers and lakes back through the beautiful forests of maple and beech and back further through the endless stretches of spruce and cedar and hemlock. These connoisseurs in natural beauty who gave up the life of conventions when called by the wild free life of the voyageur reasoned that if they looked after the transportation of the furs from the very margin of the hunting-grounds the Indians would have all the more time to mind their hunting and trapping and the whole industry would thrive the better. From the life of a voyageur it was but a step further to joining the Red men in their hunting

and then to forming liaisons with the daughters of the Red men, and many white men took the step further and cut themselves off from any probability of returning to their own people.

The French-Canadians took to the out-of-doors life with surprising ease. They quickly found favor with the Indians because of their laughing ways and companionable natures. The Indians liked their friendliness and their gay raiment, and discerned, too, the bravery of the Frenchmen in meeting danger, and admired them for it. The Frenchmen were not displeased at being looked up to by those who were far from possessing their buoyancy and merriment, though perhaps sharing their courage in the face of death. So it may be that La Verendrye, the highest-hearted and the most adventurous of them all, found the seasons pass gaily even while awaiting the time when he might gratify his taste for ocean-hunting.

La Verendrye had not been long at Lake Nipigon when he saw that more business could be brought towards the Ottawa and St Lawrence string of settlements if French trading-posts were erected west of Lake Nipigon and when the time came for these to be built his aptitude for learning where Indians congregated served him well in selecting strategic points for trade head-quarters. Posts were too costly to build and supply with a staff except at points where the dealers might meet



most easily the bands of trappers and huntsmen ~~whose wares were finding greater favor each~~ season and readier purchasers in luxurious European homes.

The differences between the French and English traders were recognized by the tribesmen and they had their preference for the gayer and more versatile French. But even so, there was still the inclination to paddle their canoe-loads of furs towards the Hudson's Bay where they had been trading ever since 1670, fifteen years before La Verendrye was born. The French themselves held the James Bay posts from 1696 to 1713, and during those years it was all one to the government officials whether the furs went to the French posts in the north or those on the Great Lakes. But now a part of La Verendrye's duty was to persuade the Red trappers and hunters that they should sell their furs nearer their tribal centres and save themselves long canoe-trips to the Hudson's Bay.

No opportunity was missed by La Verendrye of letting the Governor of the Colony know how much trade from the tribes deep in the interior behind the Great Lakes was going north, and of suggesting that it would be profitable to have it diverted eastward. The ease with which canoes could be intercepted if there were French posts further west was a string on which he harped continually.

La Verendrye's reminders about the need for more forts west of Lake Nipigon were not prompted entirely by his anxiety over the number of beaver-skins that got to Montreal. His was not a huckstering mind. Bright and dancing ocean-waves usually could be discovered somewhere when his motives were sifted. It is not difficult to understand that a few trading-posts along the way would make matters easier, just supposing an Explorer should take it into his head at any time to hunt for a Western Sea,—for ancestral hostilities were renewed on all occasions whenever a party of Sioux met Assiniboines or Crees, and one place where fuel was periodically added to the flames of hatred was the region between Lake Superior and Lake of the Woods. The lakes and rivers along that particular stretch would have to be La Verendrye's main thoroughfare if he was to make his way westward. Thus he had the best of reasons for wanting to keep the Sioux from coming into the neighborhood of the other tribes, and the only way in which this could be done was to offer inducements to the Sioux to stay on their own hunting-grounds to the south, and leave them no necessity for travelling north.

Seven years before La Verendrye went to Lake Nipigon, Father Bobe, one of the Jesuit Fathers, urged the French Government not to delay making a search for the Western Sea lest

adventurous Spaniards or Russians might have the coveted glory of the great discovery. Father Bobe described six routes which an expedition might take hopefully. His strongest recommendation was for a party to start from Kaministiquia, on the north shore of Lake Superior, where Fort William now stands. This advice was in line with the scheme planned by Intendant Michael Begon some years still earlier, to have a trading-post at Kaministiquia River, one at Lake of the Woods and one on Lake Winnipeg and explore thence for the Ocean. "We ought to try", said Monsieur Begon, "to make this discovery with fifty Canadians, who are more fit to accomplish it than men of any other nationality for they like the work and are accustomed to the hardships and to the way of living followed by the Indians."

To have the advice of still another expert, the French Government commissioned Father Charlevoix to travel to the Upper Country and visit the western forts. He was to study the prospects and estimate the cost of finding the Sea. His recommendations were written in 1723. Two proposals he thought almost equally sound. The exploration party might strike the Missouri River and follow it on up to its source, which he believed lay in the direction of the Sea. To this plan he gave a little preference himself. The alternative was

for the members of the party to ingratiate themselves into favor with the Sioux along the Upper Missouri, start a mission there, study the language, and diligently seek information from prisoners brought there from tribes in the further West till they knew as much as the aboriginal westerners could tell about the road to the Sea.

The second method would be a less costly experiment to the French Government than the first and so it was decided upon, and Fort Beauharnois (named in honor of the Governor of Canada at that time) was built in the Sioux country in 1727, the year in which La Verendrye went to the Nipigon posts to take charge of the fur-trade there.

La Verendrye was not long in the west till he saw clearly the value to the Colony and to his project for the glory of France and Canada of the Government keeping up Fort Beauharnois. In 1728, he reported to Governor Beauharnois that the difficult task of keeping the Indians off the war-path and inveigling them into a habit of working steadily at gathering furs could only be performed, as three Cree chiefs had told him, by keeping them all off their former battleground.

But the paragraphs about building forts formed the more prosaic part of the memoir sent to Quebec that summer. What mattered

to France's future or Canada's whether a thousand packs of beaver-skins more or less went down the Ottawa and the St Lawrence compared with the possibility of having a continental thoroughfare and then straight sailing to oriental lands? What La Verendrye desired, and there had not been a day in thirty years when the desire was not stirring in his thoughts, was to make his way further west until he could smell salt water. The absorbing part of the 1728 memoir to the Governor had to do with his ruling passion.

La Verendrye could give genuine color of reason to his petition to the Marquis de Beauharnois, for purely business interests demanded that trade Arctic-wards be intercepted, and this could be done only by establishing posts further west. Then, too, he had substantial grounds for believing that the Western Sea would not be hopelessly far distant when once he reached Lake Winnipeg.

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## CHAPTER VII

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### RENOWN OR OBLIVION—WHICH?

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O Canada ! Where pines and maples grow,  
Great prairies spread and lordly rivers flow.  
How dear to us thy broad domain,  
From East to Western Sea,  
Thou land of hope for all who toil,  
Thou true North strong and free.

**O**NE MORNING a tall, muscular Indian chief padded with graceful, pantherlike strides into one of the Nipigon trading-posts where La Verendrye was busy in his own cabin over records of purchases. The visitor was Auchagah and he came from the Kaministiquia, in the neighborhood of where Fort William now stands. La Verendrye was unfailing in his habit of questioning every Indian patron of intelligence. It was his means of perfecting a consummate technique for successful exploration. So Auchagah was catechised about where he lived, what routes his camp-followers travelled most, and what they knew of the Deep Sea for which the French were searching.

The tall, bronze-like chieftain said he had been far in the direction of the sunset, and in

his travels had come upon other tribes who told him of a large lake from which an important river flowed further westward for many leagues. Some of the Indians had followed this most beautiful of rivers a great way and learned that it emptied at last into an unlimited expanse of undrinkable water. This bitter water seemed hostile to the river and at times it came up the valley driving the water of the river backwards. They had travelled, so Auchagah reported his informants to have said, as far as the place where the ocean ebbed and flowed, but there were no tribes courageous enough to go further for near the ocean were men on horseback and men with clothes of armour. It was said that sailing-ships came over the Ocean. Auchagah sketched for La Verendrye on birch-bark an outline of the travels he described.

The commander of the trading-post listened spell-bound to the tale and pondered over how much of it to accept as true. No one knew better than he that the Redskins possessed vivid imaginations and that they had an infantine fondness for saying whatever they thought would be most pleasing to their Pale-face allies. He knew from long experience that their tales were to be taken with many grains of salt. He wrote once in his half-humorous way, "These people are great liars but now and then they do tell the truth".

Many Indians were questioned by La Verendrye and they said the birch-bark map was true and the guide's story of the Big Water that was bitter of taste. All the accounts they could give were indefinite and their information was many times removed from being firsthand. The Indians consulted were of one mind about there being a flat country to be crossed before one reached the strange land at River's-End. But their descriptions of the flat country were of the most nebulous beyond a mention that few trees grew there and that there were immense herds of wild animals like cattle roaming everywhere. How much of this narrative might be accepted as true? It bore, for the most part, a resemblance to the speculations that had been shaping in La Verendrye's own mind, from whence arising he scarcely knew.

During the days of Auchagah's stay and for some time to come La Verendrye was mercilessly perturbed in mind. Among themselves the Fates, if Fates there are, must have been tossing dice to decide whether it should be this valiant Canadian or another who should win the immortality of being the Discoverer of the western half of the North American Continent.

Reason and Imagination and Love of Country all assured the Explorer that the time had come for him to make a bid for the great





treasure, the glory of being the Discoverer of the Western Sea. They reminded him that he was in his prime and his sons and nephew were of an age to be invaluable helpers in the enterprise. With subtlety the three placed the suggestion where he would be constantly aware of it that he could not expect the secret hid on the west to be shrouded in mystery much longer. English and Spanish explorers even then might be planning expeditions that would end successfully, enhancing the glory of their own countries.

Self-interest warned the Commandant that an Indian's statement was not enough on which to risk the incomes, the future, the health, and even the lives of himself and his sons and the nephew who was waiting for his uncle to say the word and who would join at once in his quest. It re-iterated a hundred times that he should content himself at the trading-post where he had a reasonable number of adventures, and, if not a *dolce far niente* existence, at least a really enviable one, and where he was on excellent terms with the Indians and widening daily the circle of patrons of the Post. The point was raised that he might better wait till the missionaries had Christianized the barbarians, till more knowledge of the western wilderness was accumulated. As a final argument there was insinuated the thought: Of what use either to La Belle France

or to Nouvelle France would be the unfound bodies of an explorer and his party scalped by Indians along some lonely stream, or the bleached bones of adventurers lost in interminable woods and overtaken by starvation ?

On three successive nights La Verendrye dreamed that he and his sons had reached La Mer de l'Ouest, and he knew the liveliest transports until he awakened in chill grey dawns to a realization that as yet he had not even his canoes chartered for the high emprise. But he did not allow himself to be influenced by his dreams. What more natural than for him to dream of seeing the Ocean because of the intensity of his waking thoughts that were centred on the great adventure ?

Reason and Imagination non-plussed him by asking what delight in life would remain to him or his splendid sons supposing another leader at that very moment was mapping out an expedition into the West and was successful in reaching the rim of the continent and finding the Sea.

His whole being seemed to be in the power of the one passion that had dominated every other love in his life, the hope of discovering the western water route. There was no denying that drab years would stare him in the face if he learned that the glory of the Discovery of the Road to Cathay had been won by another.

So the conflict went on day after day as more and more of the members of the clientele of the Trading-post were consulted, each more convincing than the last about the Sea being within measurable distance. There is nothing in Greek literature comparable to the drama La Verendrye was living through and enacting in earnest in his little block-house among the woods on Lake Nipigon, a thousand miles away from his home ; for the Sea that he had in his calculations and the Prairies that were to be the great Sea of his Discovery were both of infinitely greater magnitude than the Athenian dramatists conceived of as settings of their national events, and were to become bound up with the lives and destinies of unnumbered thousands of mortals.

These summer days at the Beaver metropolis beyond Lake Superior held much that is of national interest. Few experiences through which eminent Canadians have passed are narrated capable of giving such a lift to the spirit as those which must have been La Verendrye's before he definitely enrolled himself as an explorer in search of Le Mer de l'Ouest. The day when he should arrive at his decision, whether or not it was to be in favor of the more dangerous and the more difficult part, would be of the utmost importance in his own life. It was for his own soul's sake not to choose the ignoble. To a man of his

temperament and principles to make a decision implied in itself endurance of whatever could happen from that time till his vows were put into execution, till all was consummated, or till there remained no more resources of money or strength. But he was unconscious that the moment of his forming his decision would be one of the great moments of Time.

Portraits and statues of La Verendrye picture him with a tragedian's cast of countenance, eyebrows slanted towards the centre of his forehead and with eyes deep-set peering off to great distances. The expression is true to life one can believe, though the artists have found no description existing of the appearance of the Explorer, nor any portrait painted while he lived. A lifetime of watchfulness against attack from the savages, whether while he dwelt among the forests or on the prairie, would account for the inward drawing of the eye for strength to see to far horizons. One thinks, too, of the earnestness with which this valiant Canadian must have tried to pierce the future during those fateful summer days when he knew the decision he was making would be irrevocable. With no one from whom to seek counsel, had ever mortal man before been forced to weigh the value of an Undiscovered Sea and the glory of finding it against the value of a desirable business, life at home with wife and family, and even life itself ?



La Verendrye had comprehension of the importance of the discovery of an ocean trade-way but of the vast prairie-ocean over which he was to roll back the map of Canada he had no conception. How could he know he was to stumble upon a rich and desirable country with possibilities as a granary of the world and as a homeland for as many people as all Europe held in his time ?

That one choice meant oblivion for himself and his sons and the other meant deathless honor and illustrious remembrance the lonely figure at the northern trading-post could not guess ; and if he had guessed it not much consideration would have been given to the thought. The whole issue was,—how best to serve France and Canada ? Should he stay on at a post which any one of a hundred Canadians of his acquaintance could manage capably, or should he put his gifts as explorer to some purpose,—perhaps to win for France the profit and distinction of taking possession of the west country and the shores of the ocean beyond in advance of Russia, Spain or England ; perhaps to meet insuperable barriers and know only failure ? The choice had to be made. Never till the last forever would he get from any Indian assurance more reliable than Auchagah brought that an ocean to the west existed ; and he wanted none from any in-comers, for that would mean Frenchmen and Canadians,

France and Canada, had been forestalled in the Discovery. Then, too, he could never hope to be more vigorous of mind or body than he was at that time. There was no reason for shelving the matter, and indecision was not a Verendryean trait.

The spectacular position in which La Verendrye was placed while sealing his own fate keeps recurring to one's mind. What a fitting environment within which to pronounce a bold ultimatum about a future so wonderful as his was to prove ! Glory and immortality waited upon the decision that would be made there in the wilderness not far from the height of land that separates the waters flowing towards the east and the south and all the then known part of America from the sources of those other dark rivers rolling evermore northward towards the Arctic and westward through the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific.

La Verendrye's mind was made up. He would align himself with his thirty years' dream. He would stake everything on the chance of discovering the Western Sea.

Thenceforth the Explorer spent no more time in dalliance with his magic crystal, holding it up in imagination and glorying in its beauty. From this time till his explorations ended he was to be occupied with life and death realities.

"Life, stretching out a hand to Death,  
Like heedless child, with joyous breath  
Goes singing up the ways of doom."



The choice made by La Verendrye was worthy of himself and of his ancestry. His principle, "Noblesse oblige", showed itself a real force, and two continents find the record of the remainder of his career a stimulus to the courage of their people. He displayed valor in preferring the road that would not be easy, and the pages that give an indication of how completely he possessed his soul in patience and fortitude during his years of searching for the Western Sea form one of the rarest of national treasures. History was enriched by the splendor of the far-reaching decision which terminated the dreams of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes de la Verendrye and marked the commencement of his mighty effort to make them actualities. Could he have known that not for half a century after his death would any other explorer venture to follow even as far as the limit of the land of which he and his sons were to take possession his decision still must have been the same, for he could do no less than obey his highest reason.

The setting for this period in La Verendrye's life was of a grandeur befitting the birth of an enterprise that would affect the lives of all succeeding generations. So far as having friendly advisers went, the Discoverer was alone, and this in the centre of the unbounded new continent whose wild fastnesses and painted warriors alike seemed tameless. Seldom

have the centuries found a man on such a vantage-ground on which to view him, and seldom in the broad Dominion's annals has one character towered so splendidly above his surroundings and above his countrymen. La Verendrye was set apart in distinction from the others of his century by the greatness of his purpose and his performance as at his Lake Nipigon Posts he was separated from them by illimitable woods. For nearly two centuries the searchlight of history has played upon his life and his accomplishment. It has revealed him to be irreproachable of character and leaves him standing out as the embodiment of whatever was finest in Canada at his period. It has shown his accomplishment to be such as to make him a member of the great triumvirate of American explorers. Since there no longer remain areas to be explored as wide as were his discoveries his position now can never be challenged.

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## CHAPTER VIII

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### THE PRELIMINARY RITES

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The frost that stings like fire upon my cheek,  
The loneliness of this forsaken ground,  
The long white drift upon whose powdered peak  
I sit in the great silence as one bound ;  
The rippled sheet of snow where the wind blew  
Across the open fields for miles ahead ;  
The far-off city towered and roofed in blue  
A tender line upon the western red ;  
The stars that singly, then in flocks appear,  
Like jets of silver from the violet dome,  
So wonderful, so many, and so near,  
And then the golden moon to light me home—  
The crunching snowshoes and the stinging air,  
The silence, frost and beauty everywhere.

—LAMPMAN :

“Winter Uplands.”

THE MEMOIR that went from Lake Nipigon to Quebec in 1728 carried Auchagah's birch-bark map of the river that flowed into the Western Sea and the request that the Governor release La Verendrye from the command of the posts and provide the wherewithal for an exploration trip he was willing to make through the country of the Crees and Assiniboinés. With good reason La Verendrye hoped for understanding on the part of the Governor. The latter became almost as



deeply absorbed in the project as La Verendrye. He was near enough to the scenes of the brilliant explorations of the last century and a quarter to know what perils and suffering the adventurers faced yet what conquests might be made. Moreover he knew La Verendrye's calibre and that his temperament fitted him perfectly for the proposed undertaking.

In his letter to the Governor, the Marquis de Beauharnois, setting forth his desire to be allowed to leave his trading-post and embark on an extensive exploring expedition, La Verendrye asked to be provided with seventy or eighty men from the king, together with canoes, arms and provisions.

La Verendrye spent the early part of the summer of 1728 studying a plan of exploration, and what with legendary tales of earlier travellers and wisps of information gathered here and there from the Indians to help him he mapped out a route from Lake Superior to Lake Winnipeg, a distance of 600 miles or more, that was to prove a miracle of accuracy. When he had completed his charts and descriptions he set out on the trip from his posts to Michillimakinac, (where the waters of Lakes Huron and Michigan unite), a centre for fur-traders in the west, to find an opportunity of forwarding the whole memoir to the Governor. At the same time he took along the furs

collected the winter before to exchange for further supplies for the trading-posts on Lake Nipigon.

At Michiilimakinac La Verendrye met Father de Gonnor and gave him the memoir for the Governor at Quebec. Father de Gonnor had left Montreal for the West in June, 1727, with Father Cuignas. They two were the missionaries sent among the Sioux around Fort Beauharnois on the Upper Mississippi by the French Government to learn all the Sioux and their prisoners or visitors from tribes still more westerly knew of a road to the Western Sea. The pair of priests were sent on this mission as a result of the recommendation made by Father Charlevoix four years before. Father de Gonnor had just come to Montreal from France in 1726, the year before being sent west among the Sioux. While at Fort Beauharnois he had contracted a serious internal disease, so was returning to Montreal.

Father de Gonnor took with him La Verendrye's documents, including the map drawn by Auchagah, and promised to send or take them on from Montreal to the Governor at Quebec. Records show he was in Montreal in August, 1728. He delivered the important package to the Marquis de Beauharnois and added his own endorsement of La Verendrye's undertaking and of the plan outlined for carrying it out. He said he had been long

enough among the Sioux to know it would be wiser to set up trading-posts among the Crees and Assiniboines and depend on them for co-operation in the project than to work among the Sioux. Father de Gonnor said the most promising plan was for the Government to make itself responsible for keeping the Sioux at peace and separated as far as possible from the northern Indians, their ancestral foes, and then leave it to La Verendrye's tact and wisdom to make the most of business and exploration by the undisturbed help of the friendlier Crees and Assiniboines.

The Governor eagerly studied all the proposals made by La Verendrye and he had the discernment to decide that La Verendrye himself was the one man who could most successfully put them into effect, and that therefore he should be relieved of his duties at Lake Nipigon. He invited La Verendrye to come down to Quebec and discuss things with him and interpret to him the map drawn by Auchagah showing how to reach the great river up which the salt tides came. (This was the map that brought this Indian guide the distinction of being called the first geographer of Western Canada).

It must be remembered that an invitation carried from Quebec to Lake Nipigon by canoe could not arrive over night. The missive from the Governor to the Western

Commandant went westward in the summer of 1729, and La Verendrye answered it in person by going to Quebec by return of post, meaning in the summer of 1730. He was ready to endure any amount of hardship for the sake of his dear project, but however hot the flame with which his zeal burned it could not do away with the fact that a thousand-mile canoe trip consumed the greater part of a summer. One of the most admirable qualities about the Discoverer of the North-West was his reasonableness. From first to last he was governed by his intellect; his emotions and impulses went unheard if their suggestions were in conflict with the directions laid down by his reason. His care not to wreck his own cherished dream by any fault of judgment or any giving way to the dictates of impulse must be counted unto him for righteousness forever.

More wisps of information were gleaned and more harvests of beaver-skins gathered in during the months between the time the memoir went east in 1728 and the time the writer of the memoir followed in 1730, in his egg-shell canoe making the long journey from Lake Nipigon into Lake Superior, all across the length of that lake to Sault Ste Marie, then across Northern Lake Huron to Lake Nipissing and down the Ottawa and the St Lawrence, with a visit at Three Rivers on his way.



The plan of reaching the Pacific by the net-work of lakes and rivers north and west of Lake Superior was laid before the French Governor Beauharnois with the persuasiveness that arose from La Verendrye's downright belief in it, and with the vivacity that was his as a true French-Canadian. The Governor became more and more fascinated by the magnitude and daring of the enterprise. His hopes were thoroughly awakened. All the available evidence indicated that La Verendrye was taking the right tack. It seemed probable, too, that the overland way to the Pacific might be found without a greater outlay than perhaps \$10,000, and that 70 or 80 men were enough to form the expedition.

Along with Monsieur de Beauharnois, Chaussegros de Lery, his engineer, studied the map and the memoir intensively. As La Verendrye himself had done they called to mind a hundred difficulties that might befortune the expedition. But their decision, too, was that all these might be out-riden by a leader possessing courage and savoir-faire.

The Governor had several interviews with La Verendrye and after each one he was more and more convinced that this officer possessed a solid grasp of the situation and all the qualities of generalship required for the undertaking. He carried out his promise to ask the Court at Versailles to give its sanction to

the expedition and to provide the funds required for engaging the men and fitting out the canoes. This promise and its fulfilment were in addition to the steps already taken to acquaint the Government of France with the project that was shaping itself on this side of the Atlantic in the brain of a hero of Malplaquet.

One historian states that Father de Gonnor had gone to France to hand to the Minister in charge of affairs in America the memoir prepared by La Verendrye together with the Indian guide's map, the observations made by the Marquis de Beauharnois upon the details of the proposed enterprise so far as they could be outlined in advance, and his recommendation for sufficient financial support for the exploration to end successfully.

The trip from Québec to France and back did not require two summers and a winter as the trip from Québec to the Canadian West and home again required, and La Verendrye had a right to expect that his memoir sent in 1728 would have brought a reply to Québec before the time of his arrival there in the late summer of 1730.

But alas for rosy hopes pinned to the courtiers at Versailles ! The aspirations of the Canadian of genius were not to reach their full flower of glory through any sacrifice on the part of the great in Europe. In spite of infinite pains and the tactfulness and good





judgment La Verendrye expended over the initial steps it was a disappointing reception the King and his Cabinet gave the proposal. La Verendrye waited long before getting any reply, and when one came it but confirmed the conclusions he had been gradually reaching that whatever desirable possessions became his would have to be wrested from the Fates by himself alone.

Louis the Fourteenth who encouraged exploration and colonization had died in 1715. In 1720 the regent acting for the boy king of France decided a serious attempt must be made to discover the Western Sea from the French posts that had been established beyond Lake Superior, and several minor expeditions were made. But another Louis was now of age and was dominated by his old minister, Cardinal Fleury, who did not want a single franc furnished from the treasury for carrying out the expedition, nor even official sanction given to it.

Monsieur de Maurepas at Paris was the minister of the navy and colonial affairs to whom La Verendrye's letters and maps were submitted by Father de Gonnor. He seems to have pigeon-holed the correspondence for months. Perhaps it did not mean a great deal to a powerful minister at the most brilliant court in Europe that an ambitious Canadian

officer was consumed with anxiety to be off on his explorations before some second Lief the Son of Eric the Red in his prowlings about the seas should come upon the western way to India. The French naval minister may have congratulated himself that the troublesome Colonial with his absurd maps and specifications was the width of the Atlantic away. Nothing was set aside in the estimates for any search for the Sea, and he could not have funds spared from other naval items for every visionary colonist with ambitions to set himself up as an explorer.

So no reply reached Canada in 1729. But in time M. de Maurepas got round once more to going through La Verendrye's carefully drawn up descriptions of how he proposed to conduct the enterprise if it was sanctioned and if he were placed in charge of it. The minister then turned the whole file over to Father Charlevoix who had been commissioned by the French Government a few years before to visit the forts in Western Canada and find out what was the wisest manner in which to set about the search for the Sea. It is difficult to forgive the minister of the navy for his inattention to La Verendrye's offer made for the heightened prestige of France and Nouvelle France even though he may never have visited Canada and may not have been gifted with

imagination enough to picture the little string of settlements up through the country along the rivers and lakes.

Father Charlevoix had been in America and he knew well the heart-breaking uncertainties, the interminably slow journeys, the constant calls on the courage of voyageurs and coureurs du bois who ventured across unknown Indian hunting-grounds. He was able to understand that this high-spirited trader who had circled round Lake Nipigon and consulted Crees till he had a working knowledge of the ground for a radius of 300 miles deserved better of the Government than to be left cooling his heels month after month. So when he read the documents and learned how carefully and completely La Verendrye had studied the great project he seized the first opportunity of opening up the subject with M. de Maurepas. That august personage seems to have frowned down the topic, and Father Charlevoix had to put it aside and watch for a more favorable mood on the minister's part.

Father Charlevoix waited long before he ventured once more to plead the cause of Canadian expansion. A shred of information he got through the Order of Jesuits then he utilized to give a semblance of timeliness to the expression of his opinion about La Verendrye and the enterprise on which he wished to embark. This time Father Charle-

voix did not trust to a casual conversation but he wrote to the minister. This is how the letter began :

“ Monseigneur, It is a little over a year since the views of Monsieur de la Verendrye on the subject of the Western Sea have been submitted to me. Many of his views agree with the impression I received in my travels, and that officer I heard spoken of in Canada as a man well qualified for the expedition he proposes. That is what led me at the time to mention the matter to Your Highness ; but I judged you were not prepared to give effect to the scheme, and that prevented me from pursuing the subject.

“ A letter I received by the last ship from the superior of our missions in Canada revives my hopes regarding a scheme I have always had at heart . . . and which I regard as capable of shedding glory on your administration. The father to whom I refer informed me that a Jesuit was required to accompany those who were to go in search of the Western Sea, which led me to think the idea was being seriously entertained ”.

Having thus diplomatically paved the way for a return to the subject, Father Charlevoix made his recommendations about the preparations for the exploration. He thought the person undertaking the venture should do so only after spending a year or two making short

explorations around the trading-posts of Lake Superior, but that once the main expedition was started there should be no delays for building forts and looking after fur-trade interests. If establishments had to be built they would delay the venture, they would mean expense, and the whole enterprise might degenerate into a commercial enterprise and the Sea be forgotten. "The discovery of the Western Sea is a matter that should be carried through continuously and without a stop", is how he put it.

The priest wrote of the expense for a stock of provisions and for arms and ammunition and presents for the savages. He said, too : "It is necessary that those who shall be employed shall have everything to hope for from the Court". His point was that a few intelligent and experienced men whose hearts were in the project, and who were encouraged to hope for "permanent employment or advancement according as they are favorably reported on by the commander" would accomplish more than a large number who had no special incentive. He stated that there would be heavy charges for Indian guides and for special intelligence.

Father Charlevoix' letter was all in favor of the proposal that the exploration should be carried on as a work of national expansion

and at the expense of the nation, and he had no other commander to suggest than La Verendrye. Still further reason for his letter endearing Father Charlevoix to those who read it in the light of the events that followed is found in the lines,—“The Western Sea may be comparatively near and easy to reach ; and then besides, in our search for it something may happen which has often happened in like circumstances, namely, that in searching for what we are not destined to find, we may find what we were not looking for and what would be quite as advantageous to us as the object of our search. . . . Finally, for the progress of the two colonies we have on this great continent it is not a matter of indifférence to know what bounds it on the west and on the north.”

For La Verendrye, at least, certainly not “a matter of indifference” !

To the Council of the Ministers in 1731 the memoir from Father Charlevoix was read, and also one which Monsieur de Maurepas wrote finally.

The Council of Ministers decided *that Monsieur La Verendrye's requests were reasonable and that his proposed undertaking bore an air of being practicable when the time came that money could be spent on such an object.*

This answer was sent through Monsieur de Maurepas to the Marquis de Beauharnois, the Governor of the French possessions in America. It is to the everlasting, if perhaps unsanctified, joy of La Verendrye's admirers, and to the everlasting credit of the Governor, as well as of La Verendrye, that when this deadening message reached Quebec, the Explorer was far on his way towards that North-West that had cast its long spell upon him since his childhood.

Meantime, at Quebec Messrs. Beauharnois and Hocquart, the Governor and the Indendant, having received no instructions from France during their couple of years of waiting, after the arrival of La Verendrye from the West took such action as they thought would be in the interests of France and Canada. In a letter signed by both, and written at Quebec, on October 15, 1730, they told the Minister of the Navy that La Verendrye had been seeking information about the Western Sea, and, in consequence of what he had learned on the subject, had made a proposal to go and establish a post on Lake Winnipeg, many leagues further than Kaministiquia and the posts he had commanded. La Verendrye undertook, on his part, to find voyageurs to conduct him to that place, and promised to take with him sixty men without obligation on the King's

part, except for presents for the savages through whose land he travelled.

“After having examined the proposition of the *Sieur de la Verendrye*”, ran the letter from Messrs. *Beauharnois* and *Hacquet*, “we have decided to let him go up to that place next spring on the understanding that after he has made his establishment he will be guided by the views the Court may appear to entertain respecting the prosecution of the Discovery in question.

“We flatter ourselves, *Monseigneur*, that you will not disapprove of our having taken it upon ourselves to permit the *Sieur de la Verendrye* to undertake this establishment which can only result in great advantage for the Colony, not only on account of the peltries obtainable in that locality which now go to the English (on the *Hudson's Bay*) but also on account of the proximity of the place to the Western Sea as assured and certified by the savages on the strength of having been there themselves.”

Accompanying this letter to Versailles in October, 1730, was a memoir from *La Verendrye* who did not allow himself to be put out of countenance by the fact that no notice seemed to have been taken of the memoir and the birch-bark map sent to *Quebec* and on to France in 1728. In his new memoir *La Verendrye* said he had been neglecting nothing



that could give him knowledge of the fine and mighty river flowing straight west, (from Lake Winnipeg), and that he had taken care to secure a savage able to conduct a party if His Majesty gave the command for the search for the Western Sea to be undertaken.

La Verendrye mentioned the memoir he sent earlier by Father de Gonnor and the fact that the chosen guide was Auchagah who drew the map—"a savage of my Post", he called him. This Indian was greatly attached to the French and there would be no fear of being abandoned by the guide if it was Auchagah. He repeated for the benefit of the Court all that this Indian had told him of the West, and his account of a slave, taken prisoner by the Assiniboines and later living among the Crees, informing them of villages along the Western River where grain was raised, where mud huts were made, where no canoes were used, and where the men hunted with bows and arrows. The slave did not know whether or not they were far from the Sea. He did not think there was any man bold enough to pass by the different nations that were found lower down in order to make an exploration.

To get to this river's mouth, La Verendrye surmised, explorers would need to leave the Lake of the Woods early in March and they could not get back till November. But this was admitted to be hearsay, as was all the

information received from the Indians who had never explored the river's mouth since fear held them back ; besides, as they could get all they desired by taking the twenty days' trip to the Hudson's Bay, why should they take the pains to make a trip that required from March to November ?

The whole right bank of the great River of the West, La Verendrye's memoir stated, was held by Crees. It abounded in moose and marten, while beaver was so plentiful that the savages placed little value on it and collected only the large skins. The people dressed in beaver skins in the winter and threw them away in spring. The Colony would receive new benefit independently of the discovery of the Western Sea through the quantity of furs that would be produced, (furs that up to that time went to waste), for the Indians promised in the spring of 1729 they would come to La Verendrye's post at Kaministiquia. To reach Lake Winnipeg by September it was necessary to leave Montréal in the spring. From Assiniboines and Sioux he was assured that the nations 700 or 800 miles further west raised crops, and was told that for lack of wood they made dwellings from mud.

That La Verendrye knew a good deal about human nature at Court as well as in camp appears plain from his method of winding up his letter : " It only remains for

me to represent to you the importance, as it seems to me, of proceeding promptly with this exploration. The Crees are carrying on business with the English on the Hudson's Bay, finding interpreters in the Indians of that neighborhood, and it is natural that they should speak there of the prospect of having French among them, and that they should give there the same information which they have given to us here. The English have every interest in getting ahead of us, and if we allow them time they will not lose the chance of doing it."

One pictures the eagerness with which La Verendrye watched the boat bearing these documents leave from the St Lawrence for France and his still more ardent eagerness for the arrival at Quebec of the boat that might bring the royal assent to the project and the wherewithal for it to be prosecuted to a glorious denouement.

It was never La Verendrye's habit to wait in idleness for ships to come or go, and, instead of spending month after month watching by every sail that came into view for instructions from the Court about financing his project, he made a temporary contract with the Governor of Canada which would not involve the royal exchequer to the extent of a dollar even and would mean time gained if the Court finally decided to promote the undertaking.

The Marquis de Beauharnois found the prospect alluring of being able to claim for his regime expansion of the Colony and the unravelling of the great secret. So he agreed to La Verendrye's waiting no longer if he was resourceful enough to secure funds for financing the undertaking. Till the hoped for assistance should come from Versailles, the Governor promised the Explorer a monopoly of the fur-trade with whatever clientele he could draw around himself in the West. Taking counsel with himself, La Verendrye found the emprise losing nothing of its splendor and importance though the powerful French princes did fail to catch its significance. He dismissed from mind for the time all thoughts of the Government and its indifference to an officer who desired nothing so much as expansion of the land under French rule and to have the glory of being the Discoverer of the Western Sea.

Imprimis, there was the co-operation of his own family to enlist. The three oldest of his sons made ready to accompany La Verendrye with all their father's keenness of spirit over the prospect of penetrating unknown wildernesses and venturing upon experiences that might need all their faculties kept sharpened. Jean-Baptiste was eighteen years old ; Pierre, seventeen ; and François, sixteen. Louis-Joseph being but fourteen was

not permitted to leave his home and his studies. Their cousin, Christophe Dufrost, Sieur de la Jemmeraye, was given the important position of lieutenant of the expedition. La Jemmeraye was a Canadian officer who had been stationed for some time among the Sioux south of Lake Superior. He had mastered the technique of trapping and hunting and knew almost as much of woodlore as the copper-colored natives around the Mississippi. His understanding of the mental processes of the Indians was to be depended upon, and he possessed facility in winning the confidence of men, both red and white. He was twenty-two years old, and had been made lieutenant of a company of infantry by the Governor's recommendation in recognition of earlier services. Though without his uncle's ripened knowledge and without his supreme ability to influence the current of other lives to rush along with his, Christophe had the charm of youth, a buoyant nature, and boundless faith in the success of the expedition. On such shoulders would devolve the burden of responsibility in the event of the thread of the life of the leader being suddenly snapped.

When once the preparations for departure were begun La Verendrye knew happiness in great measure from the very process of striking out where Destiny led, Destiny that had been his familiar from the time he was fourteen years old. In equal measure there

was happiness in having his nephew and his sons understand every wish almost before he expressed it and in seeing them put their energies so gladly into the enterprise that was a passion with him. At times he felt a trace of pity for explorers who had been deprived of intimate companionship with their associates, and appreciation such as he knew. He wondered if they had not missed a great deal of the ecstasy of achievement through lack of heartening young allies like his.

La Verendrye's own resources were not sufficient for engaging the necessary number of men and canoes even though he decided to make the venture with only fifty men, including his sons and nephew and a priest who was to join them at Fort Michillimakinac. But the Governor had promised him exclusive trading privileges over all the land he discovered and he was hopeful of making the expedition pay for itself and even prove a profitable investment. When securing from the Governor the monopoly of the fur-trade in the North-West for himself and whoever became his partners by putting money into the venture, La Verendrye had to sign an agreement to build three forts, one at Rainy Lake, another at Lake of the Woods, and a third at Lake Winnipeg. Each was to be of two or more rows of stakes, and have a house for the commanding officer, a chapel, a house for the missionary and such

other buildings as were needful. The papers were careful to specify that La Verendrye was to make use of every opportunity to promote fur-trading and that he was to consider himself bound to pay the expenses of exploration through the commercial dealings carried along simultaneously with it.

There were clauses in the contract about the necessity of the Explorer making every effort to conciliate the Indians through whose haunts he passed. The mild-mannered way La Verendrye used in all his relationships with the Redskins and his constant watchfulness to prevent hostile tribes coming into collision with each other were known to the easterners. He had begged the Government on occasions to be responsible for keeping the Sioux off the war-path while he himself cajoled the northern tribes into preserving peace. But it was characteristic of La Verendrye that he was willing to fall in with the desires of those around him almost without discussing the point so long as the matter was nothing that would harm his great project or work injustice to anyone. So, though it was needless for him to go bond about being conciliatory toward the dusky tribes, he signed the clause and trusted that the people at Quebec would feel the safer for having it inserted.

La Verendrye's pledges about the posts had been given in return for the seals of the

monopoly and the last business details straightened out with the Governor. But he still had to secure money with which to get his company to the West, to build the trading-posts, and to manage affairs till the time when beaver-skins and other furs were bargained for from the Indians. He knew at this time that the Governor entertained expectations of France offering to share in his explorations just as soon as he had the three more westerly posts in running order and had proven capable of establishing himself among the savages on new ground. Still he could not help wishing the Government had given him backing from the commencement so that he could have proceeded a little more authoritatively on the expedition. The money required he hoped to get from merchants in Montreal who would become in this way his partners in his far west fur-trading. Fur-trading! His spirits were dampened when he thought of the commercial aspect of his venture. He had a foreboding that either the exploring or the trading would come to grief with his interest partly expended on finding the Western Sea and partly on building up a flourishing business that would meet the expenses of the enterprise and allow him to pay the high rate of interest that would be asked for money lent for so uncertain a purpose as ocean-hunting. But as the Government was not helping him in the



venture, he had no alternative to seeking money on the security of his monopoly charter ; and it was not his way to pay much attention to misgivings about whatever could not be avoided. So forward to Montreal he went.

When discussing with the merchants at Montreal his requirements, La Verendrye was quick to detect that they did not grow particularly enthusiastic over the suggestion of having partnership in what one of them called "another useless trip to nowhere", (referring to unsuccessful searches made for the Sea), so he adroitly shelved the exploration phase for conversations with his men and the circle at home where the faces lit up at each mention of the discovery that might be his. With those from whom he hoped to secure money he saw it was best to dwell on the practical side of the scheme, the prospect of a large business in furs at the trio of posts he was to build much to the west of those already furthest from Montreal. Their imaginations were quite equal to limning this sort of success, and they promised to wait for the interest on their money till he sent back a cargo of furs.

La Verendrye had not lived as an active man of affairs, as affairs went in that morning of time along the St Lawrence, without knowing that his holding a trade monopoly for the West meant enemies would spring up at once. He had seen the envy of Canadian


merchants directed many a time against concessionaires whose connections were with rival firms. He knew it to be a serious matter since business interests were concerned and business success was the paramount concern of many. He had no wish to injure any business man, and he could only hope that less hostility would be aroused since his posts were to be established on virgin trapping-grounds and would interfere with no one's customary connections than would have been felt if he had been granted a concession nearer home and held before by another. But he had little time for thoughts other than of getting under weigh while the summer of 1731 was still young.

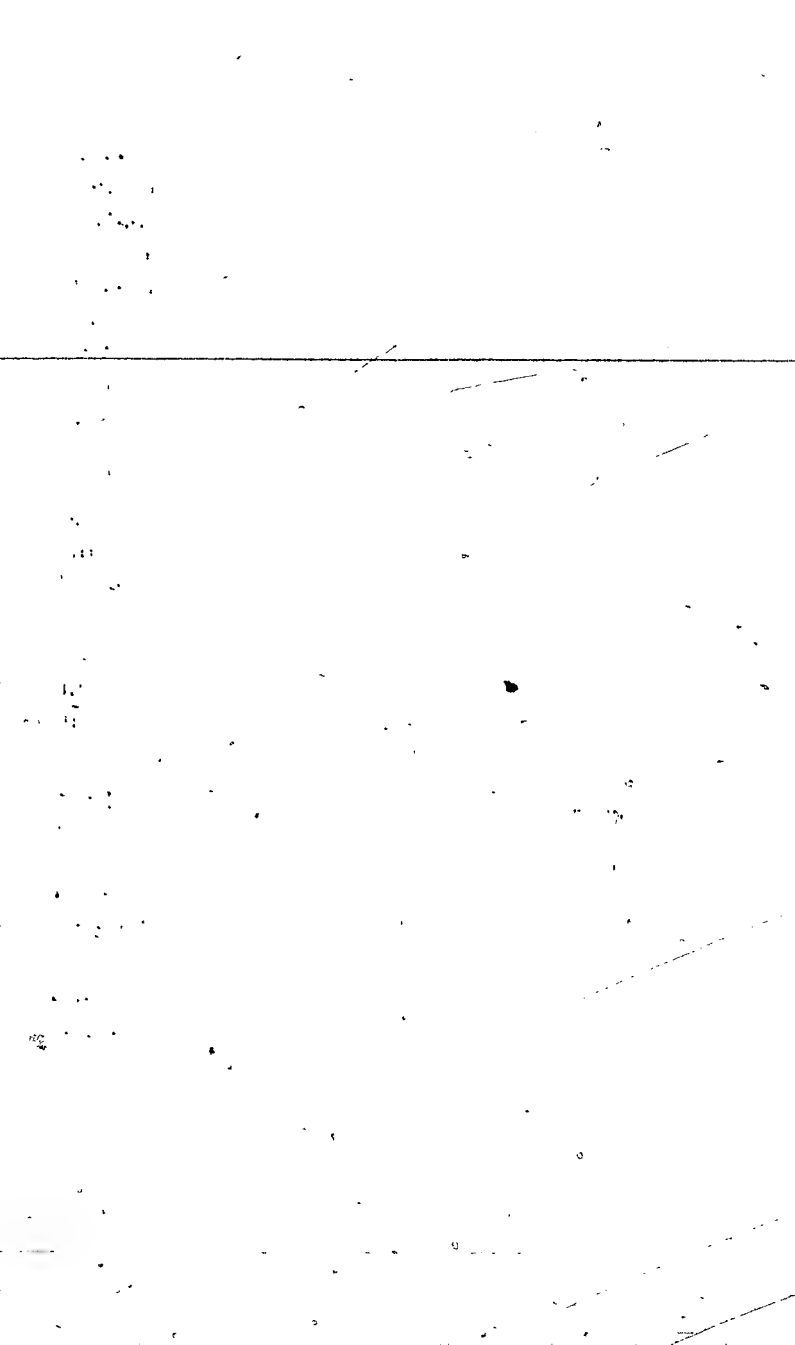
The Quebec agreement was that La Verendrye and his partners were to recoup themselves for the expenses of the forts out of the profits of the fur-trade.

On May 19, 1731, La Verendrye signed the deed of partnership with a few men in Montreal. It was accepted as an important occasion and there were hopes that it would become an historic one. Monsieur de Chassagne, Governor of Montreal, was present.

Now that the expedition was an assured reality its Leader made the final arrangements for departure.

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## CHAPTER IX

### A THOUSAND-MILE VOYAGE

We would keep  
All dear tradition ; be it picturesque  
Of floating ribbons, happy, noisy, free ;  
Or polished in the careful cavalier,  
Fresh furbelowed from out his sunny France,—  
Heroic, in the story of Verchères ;  
Or dark, in that of dismal Beaumanoir.  
Through the long years we see as in a dream—  
And will not part with it—the Old Regime.  
Powdered tresses and rich brocade,  
Stately matron and charming maid ;  
Flashing steel and stubborn rust,  
Blood for blood and thrust for thrust ;  
Hand on heart in the good old style  
Courtly lips on lips without guile ;  
The young sweet land of La Nouvelle France  
Knew it all by a strange sweet chance.

—SERANUS,

“The Old Regime”.

ALL WAS IN ORDER by June 8, and La Verendrye, the last of the greatly-renowned explorers of the New World, with his fifty men, left Montreal on the voyage they hoped would end only when they had smelled brine. It was not to be theirs to find the Western Sea, but they had the distinction of making discoveries that will stand unparalleled in coming centuries. If the valorous leader and his men could have known they were on the verge of opening up for the habitation of white men as much valuable land as all the

other North American explorers together had discovered in 239 years what emotions would have stirred within them ! Yet for some of the members of the expedition it was a merciful veil that hid the future.

Before La Verendrye's little flotilla would arrive at Fort Kaministiquia, on the western shore of Lake Superior, at the point where Fort William is now situated, a thousand miles of paddling and portaging had to be counted off ; and yet, so incredibly swift were the canoe-men, their craft were drawn up on the shore at Fort Kaministiquia on August 26, 1731, a little less than twelve weeks from the time of leaving Montreal.

To follow the route taken by the Explorer on that memorable journey would be to make an excursion through a long panorama of scenery as beautiful and varied as any continent affords. Nor is it devoid of historic charm for since La Verendrye traversed the way from the St Lawrence to the Pigeon River on his brave crusade nearly two centuries ago much of Canada's story has been written along the very lakes and rivers that knew the string of French trading-posts of his time. High-spirited doings had transpired along the St Lawrence and the Ottawa for a hundred years before that time, on the part of white men in their warfare with the savages, and those rivers seemed the home of heroism as well as of beauty.

Too many of the records dwell on the weeks of stress and strain in La Verendrye's life and pass lightly over the days that were colored for him by romance and quiet enjoyment and all the delights that a man whose body and mind are tingling with life and a huge purpose knows. The narrative of his explorations may wait while one tries to picture the glowing summer weeks during which his canoe-men paddled day after day in the direction of the sunset. The road was known already to La Verendrye yet the exceeding loveliness of river, lake and forest on the long sunny days never failed to bring gladness to his heart, for he was a man of eager perceptions and cultivated mind.

The Commander of the little fleet was comparatively free to give himself up to the influences of his surroundings and to long thoughts of the best means of proving himself equal to the purpose in his mind. There was the ceaseless need even during the early part of the trip to guard against surprise attacks from fugitive bands of Iroquois, but to keep vigilant watch was second nature to him and his contemporaries, and then his canoe-men were professionals as were all the adventurers he had selected to accompany him to trade, to explore, to fight, to build, to do whatever circumstances demanded. The Commander had opportunity to enjoy fully the satisfaction

of being afloat on his long studied voyage. How to dispose of his half hundred men with a view to pushing on most safely and surely to the Western Sea while yet the building of the three forts was in progress and the fur-trading was promoted stirred thoughts filling part of his hours, but not to the exclusion of gathering memories of the three months scenes of linking lakes, streams and rivers. Compensation for many of the unhappy experiences La Verendrye was to know before his years of exploration ended was offered by the endless vistas of peace and grandeur through which the canoes glided during those summer weeks of 1731.

Though the immense importance of the morning of the embarkation could not be foreseen as it was to loom up through centuries to come, yet those at Montreal did recognize that not since the time of Sieur de la Salle had so pretentious a company started from the town as was made up by La Verendrye and his entourage of voyageurs, interpreters and officers. Friends of the fifty members of the party watching them take their places in the canoes felt strong emotions, for life even in the settlements between Montreal and the Atlantic had its hazards, while in the minds of the home-keeping friends left behind the dangers awaiting the travellers

in the unpenetrated western wilds at the end of the thousand miles of known adventure had the terror of the unfamiliar.

For several miles just above Montreal the St Lawrence has so swift a current that canoes cannot be taken up the river loaded. So the goods were sent by land to Lachine, nine miles upstream, and only the men embarked at Montreal. On arriving at Lachine the canoes took on the goods sent by land, just as La Salle's canoes had done about fifty years before. It was from the fact of La Salle's starting from this point on what he thought was a north-west way to China that the spot took its name. In 1687 (the year of La Salle's death in the South) treacherous Indians crept into Lachine and massacred 200 French with scenes of nameless horror. This dreadful occurrence was recalled by the canoeists who were leaving their homes to go among savages whose cruelty had no bounds for all they knew.

From Lachine, where the river widens out into Lake St Louis and the view is one of the fairest, La Verendrye's party were off on the first stretch of their voyage. The approved program for travellers in the days of the paddle was to leave Montreal and Lachine at the right time of day to bring them to St Anne's, two miles past the upper end of the Island of Montreal, about nightfall. Here the merchandise of the boats had to be carried for a





distance. St Anne is the patroness of Canadians in their travels by water and even as early as La Verendrye's day it was customary to sing at St Anne's the evening hymn as soon as the woods on the shore looked dim. So ~~the men went to confession there and offered~~ up their vows. At daybreak they were again dipping their oars in the twinkling waters, and by noon reached St Sulpice where they might rest for two hours and still make the foot of the Long Sault in the Ottawa River by sundown. The Long Sault is one of the places hallowed for all generations to come because of the heroism of Dulac and his companions in defending themselves against the savages attacking their fort. For a company starting out on a mission that would take them into the lands of unknown Indian tribes to spend a night at the Long Sault was to feel something of the courage of the storied seventeen descend upon their souls.

Three times within as many miles the canoes had to be unladen and carried, as well as their freight, on the shoulders of the voyageurs. But at last the leaping waters were passed and then no other trading-post nor any habitation was seen for thirty-four miles when some Frenchmen in charge of a fur-centre were visited. For much of the way the company rowed through forest primeval seeing no opening except that of the river-

course. Meadow-lands on the lower south bank now and then gave the appearance of a flood of sunlight captured in the extensive forest.

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The French canoes usually carried eight men, the most skilful and incidentally the most highly paid being those at the head and foot. According to Alexander Henry, an explorer who went over this route to the West a few years after La Verendrye's last voyage, each man was allowed to have a forty-pound bag of personal possessions with him, and the regulation cargo of a canoe was sixty pieces of merchandise each weighing 90 or 100 pounds, so that the entire load of one boat was about four tons. The merchandise was parcelled in such fashion as to be most easily carried on the men's backs when a portage was reached. The canoe-men had the carrying process studied to perfection and they could load and unload the boats with the utmost swiftness and precision. They knew how to place the parcels on their backs to be carried most securely and to leave the greatest possible freedom of limb. An amateur might handle a cargo successfully enough on a trip down a stream or two but La Verendrye knew the value of having experienced men when starting for a post 1,000 miles distant, which even at that was to be but the base from which they were to commence their explorations.

For the known part of the way, the first 1,000 miles, there was need to unload the goods frequently in the course of a week's progress, and carry them past falls or rapids, and only to men of experience and powers of endurance could be entrusted the responsibility of helping bring the enterprise to a fortunate conclusion.

Before coming to what is now Ottawa's almost unrivalled scenic environment the canoeists watched the Hare River descend from the high north bank into the river they were ascending. Then the next famed landmark to be watched for was the Rideau River, 400 yards wide at its mouth, falling perpendicularly from the edge of a rock forty feet high and having the appearance of a graceful curtain, (or its French equivalent, rideau), of wondrous sheen. The Rideau riverfall is of rare magnificence and a beautiful setting is given for the capital city of Canada, a Canada extending many hundreds of miles further west than La Verendrye or his confreres guessed.

At La Grand Chaudiere, two or three miles beyond Rideau, is a portage a quarter of a mile long, a detail that meant much more to the boatman of 200 years ago than it does to a student of history today. Three miles further, and the canoes had to be unloaded and reloaded, and at the end of five miles more there is a portage half a mile long. A carrying-

place, rocky, high and difficult, occurs at the head of the widening of the Ottawa River which forms Lake des Chaudieres. At the Portage des Chats there are many waterfalls and the scene is of indescribable beauty.

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Looking a mile up the river, one sees it two miles wide and broken by islands into seven openings with a falls at each, all of them as white as drifts of new snow.

For the next six miles canoes can climb the river only by taking half a load at once, and it was needful to return for the other pieces. The river broadens again and becomes the Lake des Chats, thirty miles long and six miles wide, a beautiful sheet of water with a gentle current.

In the twenty-mile stretch making up the Channels of the Grand Calumet the goods had to be taken seven times from the boats, and four times out of the seven the boats themselves had to be carried. At the Portage du Grand Calumet the carrying-place is steep and it needed twelve men to carry one canoe. This portage cost the travellers a whole day allowing a little while for making repairs to the canoes.

When the River Mattawan was sighted the travellers knew they were 308 miles from Montreal. A 34-miles row on the Mattawan, with fourteen portages to be negotiated, some of them rocky and steep, brought the party to a height of land over which the canoes had



to be carried but they were soon launched again on a little river going towards Lake Nipissing,—and at last they were paddling with the current for a while. The fact was mentioned that Champlain had journeyed as far west as Lake Nipissing one hundred years earlier.

Once across Lake Nipissing, they entered the French River for its fifty-five miles descent towards Lake Huron. In this rocky region they found scores of places where it was unsafe to trust the canoes loaded. These carrying-places were from 25 paces to 540 paces long. It was not yet the time of the ripening of wild fruits but a member of the company recalled the fact that during his explorations around the shores of the Georgian Bay in 1535 Jacques Cartier came upon Indians who were picking blue-berries to dry for winter, rustling fire-wood and harvesting wild oats.

Towards the mouth of the French River their course was level and smooth, and then from the calm bosom of the river the canoes entered the rougher waters of Lake Huron. Coasting along, with Manitoulin Island, the greatest of the 30,000 islands in Lake Huron, on the south, the canoes passed the hundreds of islands scattered along the 88 miles from the mouth of the French River to the mouth of the Mississagi, and from that point La Verendrye and his men rowed towards Mich-

illimakinac where they were to be joined by Father Messaiger, the Jesuit Father who would be chaplain of the expedition.

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The fort at Michillimakinac had been established by Pere Marquette as a mission station. Its enclosure of two acres was surrounded by cedar-wood pickets. No Indians seen further east presented quite so evil an appearance as the Chippewayans who stalked around in this neighborhood. Even thirty years later an English adventurer who visited this post spoke of the savages he saw here having their bodies naked from the waist up except for those who had blankets over their shoulders. Some had their faces painted with charcoal mixed with grease and wore feathers through their noses as a fearsome adornment.

Between 90 and 100 miles of paddling lay between Fort Michillimakinac and Sault Ste Marie at the entrance of Lake Superior. At Sault Ste Marie a mission had been built by Pere Marquette but it was abandoned forty years before La Verendrye first made his way west. However, in 1750 the Marquis de la Jonquiere, Governor of Canada at that date, gave a nephew of his six leagues square of land for a fort there vindicating Pere Marquette's clear-sightedness about the importance of the spot, (and leaving one to surmise that

men in authority even in times when the continent was less crowded than now had a leaning towards serving their own).

From Sault Ste Marie the fragile canoes were launched on the dark-blue, white-pointed waters of Lake Superior, looking for all the world like a tiny cloud of brown beech-leaves, so minute were they against the great, un-resting inland sea, and so unequal to the turbulence of billows whipped by cold winds day-long.

The success of the expedition and the lives of the men in the frail craft hung by slender threads from the day they left Sault Ste Marie on the eastern edge of the lake till they touched the western shore, though at that period to be on Lake Superior had the one advantage of offering complete safety from Indians, as the Red warriors had not yet learned the art of canoe-building so perfectly as to trust themselves in their little egg-shell barques on the rough lake.

At the mouth of the Nipigon River Indians were met who had been often in former days at La Verendrye's trading-posts on Lake Nipigon, 31 miles up the river. This river, though short, is the largest flowing into Lake Superior. The height of land between the rivers flowing into James and Hudson's Bays and those flowing into Lake Superior lies not far northward. *Deep, clear water* was the

interpretation of the Indian name for the lake and river Nipigon. Nipigon River gave no joy to canoe-men however great its beauty. The loveliness of its rapids and cataracts for ~~them lost much in the face of the need for~~ repeated unloading of the boats.

As early as 1661 Radisson and Groseilliers went up the Nipigon and reported that many Indians were in the neighborhood and that furs taken there were of superior quality. In 1684 the Sieur de Lhut was sent there to try to lure the fur-trade products towards the St Lawrence instead of letting them go up over the height of land to the Hudson's Bay posts in the north. In the palmiest days of the fur-trade as many as 100 packs of beaver-skins left Lake Nipigon in a month.

It was here the expedition was joined by Auchagah, the Indian who first told La Verendrye of the River of the West and who promised to serve as his guide through the new wild country the French would explore before finding the bitter water into which the great river descended. The company was approaching rapidly now the place where they would need to become builders, hunters, and a diplomatic corps after three months of having demonstrated their skill as expert navigators.

From the place where the Nipigon River flows into Lake Superior three or four days



canoeing brought the travellers to Fort Kaministiquia, the special distinction of which was that of being the French post, furthest from Montreal. Kaministiquia was over 400 miles from Sault Ste Marie. The fort had been built in 1678 by D. G. de Lhut, and was reported to be one "which did considerable dis-service to the English settlements in Hudson's Bay". It was re-built in 1717, but after La Verendrye's time was abandoned again till 1804.

From the half-century-old Fort Kaministiquia to the Grand Portage at the mouth of the Pigeon River (or Groseilliers, as it was called then) it was a run of less than forty miles. It was now the end of August and La Verendrye thought of making the plunge into the unknown territory at once. He wished to build the first of the three forts named in his contract before winter set in and before his men would need to start collecting beaver-skins. But he was disappointed in his expectation of reaching Rainy Lake that autumn.

Before the canoes could be launched on Pigeon River a long portage past water-falls and rapids had to be made. Thirty years later it took Alexander Henry's exploring party seven days of laborious effort to make it. Two ridges of land with a meadow-land and a stream of water between them had to be crossed in the course of this long haul. The

name, Grand Portage, was applied to the nine miles carrying-place to surmount the numerous falls near the outlet of the Pigeon River, but it later came to mean the landing-place at the commencement of the portage on Lake Superior a few miles south of the river. It is in the present State of Minnesota, and Pigeon River forms part of the boundary-line between Minnesota and Ontario. French and English traders in succeeding years followed the route of La Verendrye's travels till this became the established road to the North-West.

At the Grand Portage La Verendrye's men refused to proceed further. The reason given was the magnitude of the task of carrying the freight for nine miles. Perhaps their imaginations conjured up risks and dangers unthought of till they came to the borders of unfamiliar territory. The men now deliberately holding back the enterprise were the ones who at Montreal were whole-hearted about the expedition and who were chosen by its Commander because of their experience and craftsmanship. They may have been assailed by a fear that once within the woods beyond Lake Superior they would never emerge. It was well within the limits of possibility that they would meet their fate by torture at the hands of evilly disposed pagans and that their homes in the east would

be left desolated. All scruples about marring the prospects of the expedition vanished.

Whether it was weariness from the length of the voyage that disheartened the men for the long portage or whether it was anxiety lest the task of carrying the cargo for the nine miles was but the prelude to greater hardships that caused their defection, the certain thing is that La Verendrye was in a serious quandary. Fur-trading must be carried on both for the sake of the project and that faith might be kept with the partners in Montreal. The search for the Western Sea so long delayed could not now be abandoned through foolish fears ; and the men who were backing the venture had a right to expect a plump consignment of beaver-skins from him the next summer. Whatever plan would most speedily bring the men to reason must be the one chosen. Any sacrifice required of the Commandant would be made so long as the great purpose was not endangered.

As at every critical point during the long search for the Sea, (and in the next twelve years there came many hours that tried the soul of this devoted Canadian), La Verendrye studied the situation with admirable calm. He could overlook lack of deference to himself ; it seems never to have occurred to him to dwell on what was due to himself. So he did not resort to recriminations at this crisis. Happily

he was not working with strangers alone. His nephew, his sons and the priest had as much confidence as himself in the ultimate success of the adventure and he consulted with them as to the wisest course to take in the face of this sudden faint-heartedness on the part of the men. "Always counselling and cooking" the French often said derisively of the Indians. La Verendrye too had a leaning towards much counselling, and never in his life was he more seriously than now in earnest to find a conciliatory road out of the difficulty. Whatever could hearten the men for proceeding with the trip into the fearsome, mysterious regions to the west the Commandant would perform gladly.

The impasse resolved itself finally in the little company breaking into two sections for a time, part of the men proceeding to Rainy Lake and the others going back to Fort Kaministiquia for the winter. By the help of Father Messaiger one of the men La Verendrye had hired was persuaded that the honorable thing to do was to carry out the terms of his engagement, and he volunteered to accompany the Sieur de la Jemmeraye and Jean-Baptiste de la Verendrye on up to Rainy River. Others of the company were led to the same conclusion, or else additional men, natives of the district, were engaged, as four canoes were filled with goods and sent forward under

men willing to investigate, with La Jemmeraye as lieutenant, what lay between Lake Superior and Rainy Lake.

La Verendrye, accompanied by Pierre and François and by Father Messaiger, as well as by the men who rebelled against proceeding, went back around the curve of land from the Pigeon River to Fort Kaministiquia (Fort William) where they would spend the winter. La Jemmeraye and Jean were to bring word down in the spring from Rainy Lake to Fort Kaministiquia as to how they had fared among the Indians. The arrangement resulted in La Verendrye and those with him marking time for nine months,—from the end of August, 1731, till early in June, 1732. The impatience on the part of the Leader of the expédition may be imagined. For him now everything depended on what news came from the group who penetrated further. Heaven send that they were not annihilated. If they returned with the breaking up of the ice in the spring and if they had a favorable account to give of the country visited there was hope of all the company regaining confidence and carrying out the purpose for which they were in the West.

Christophe Dufrost, Sieur de la Jemmeraye, with Jean Baptiste de la Verendrye had been directed to build a fort and establish fur-trading with the Indians at Rainy Lake. They were provided with an intelligent guide

and they made the trip safely. Once past the seven-days Grand Portage the four canoes went on up Pigeon River to a falls (Partridge Portage) and the next day they left the Pigeon River and carried the canoes three tedious miles over a mountain ridge and came to the first of a chain of small lakes separated by carrying-places anywhere from half a mile to three miles long.

At the end of the labyrinth of lakes and connecting creeks they found the heads of small streams not flowing towards Lake Superior but north-westward. This region of lakes and streamlets is called the Height of Land. The woods found there were of birch, pine, spruce, fir and maple. Following steadily along, the voyageurs soon reached the place where the streams were wide enough to float the canoes and their freight, the men walking in the water and pushing. Then came a day when the paddles could be used and by hard work and happy fortune they got to Rainy Lake, 225 miles west of Lake Superior, before winter locked up the lakes and rivers.

Immediately La Jemmeraye and his men built a fort close to the place where Rainy Lake empties into Rainy River and a couple of miles east of the present site of Fort Frances. From a pyramid-shaped hill near by, apparently built by man for a special purpose, an excellent view over the lake was

obtained. Where Fort Frances stands the Monsoni Indians had a group of cabins for the fishing there was of the best. The Sieur de la Jemmeraye's fort was named St Pierre in honor of the lieutenant's uncle, the chief of the expedition. The ruins of the fort may still be seen.

La Verendrye's own version of the beginnings of the expedition is of the greatest interest. No instructions from France about the expedition were received by the Governor at Quebec up to the time of the exploration party starting west. At Michillimakinac there was an opportunity for sending missives down to Quebec and La Verendrye wrote a letter from that fort to the Minister of the Navy, Monsieur de Maurepas, once more explaining the situation to him. The letter dated August 1, 1731, reads in part as follows:

"The Marquis de Beauharnois has done me the honor to detail me to go and establish a fort at Lake Winnipeg with fifty men including a missionary... Next year I shall have the honor of reporting to him... and if he considers it advisable to send me to make exploration in the most distant West I shall be ready at once to start with my nephew La Jemmeraye, who is my second in command, and my three sons whom I have here with me.

"I take the liberty of representing to Your Highness that in my present enterprise

I am only seeking to carry the name and arms of His Majesty into a vast stretch of countries hitherto unknown, to enlarge the Colony and increase its commerce.... I therefore beg you to grant me the north for a period of five years... The expenses I have incurred, with a number of persons who are accompanying me up to the present, for the establishment of the post are very considerable.... If God grants me the fortune to succeed I shall have the honor of going in person to bring the news to Your Highness."

A later memoir written by La Verendrye, summarizing his years in the West has the following paragraphs bearing on this part of his career :

"The glory of the King and the advantage of the Colony have always been the only motives which have actuated me in this enterprise... Everyone is aware that Canada is very poor ; few merchants are in a position to make advances, especially for an enterprise of this nature, being obliged to make their returns every year.

"On the strength of certain memoirs which I had the honor to submit to the Governor of Canada on the subject of the explorations and establishments which it was necessary to make in order to reach the Western Sea he was kind enough to give me instructions to go and carry out the project.



“ I left Montreal on June 8, 1731, intending to mark my perfect attachment to the service to which all my ambition is confined. I associated several persons with myself in order the more easily to provide for the expenses which the enterprise might involve. In passing Michillimackinac I took Father **Messaiger**, Jesuit, with me as our missionary.

“ We arrived on August 26 at the Grand Portage of Lake Superior, which is fifteen leagues from Kaministiquia.

“ On the 27th all our people in dismay at the portage which is three leagues long mutinied and loudly demanded that I should return. But with the aid of our missionary father I was able to induce one man out of the number of these I had hired to go with my nephew La Jemmeraye, my second in command, to establish the post of Rainy Lake. I had enough to equip four medium-sized canoes. I had the portage made at once and I gave them a good guide.

“ I was obliged to winter at Kaministiquia, which was a great loss to me both as regards the payment of the hired men and the goods I had on my hands, without any hope of recovering any portion of the expense which was considerable.”

It will be remembered that Father Charlevoix at Versailles put into writing his views about the wisdom of having exploration made

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for the Western Sea and offered the suggestion that La Verendrye was a man eminently suitable for commanding the party of explorers. He made recommendations about the need for the project being financed by the Government and for the members of the expedition having "everything to hope for from the Court". The subject of the Discovery of the Western Sea was discussed by the Council of Ministers, and mention has been made already of the decision of that body,—“That the Sieur de la Verendrye's requests were reasonable and his proposed undertaking bore an air of being practicable when the time came that money could be spent on such an object.”

The Governor and the Intendant, Messrs. Beauharnois and Hocquart, replied jointly on October 10, 1731, the fall after La Verendrye and his small fleet started for the West, assuring the Court at Paris that there would be no danger about the undertaking degenerating into a fur-trading venture. The posts that were to be built would be in places where the men would have to spend the winter and where they could make the acquaintance of Indians who would throw light on their travels. Much light was needed by the Explorer and his men about the far West and they would have to depend on the savages for it.

This letter signed by the two chief men in charge of administering affairs in Canada

states that since the King had not thought proper to provide for the expenses which La Verendrye had assumed, La Verendrye of necessity had been granted the trade of the settlements, or as they put it, "Some means had to be found of indemnifying him, and no more suitable means was in sight than to let him enjoy the fruit of his own labors."

These correspondents told the Court that La Verendrye had been among the western Indians since 1727 and that the persons he had chosen to go with him were those who seemed the best qualified for such an expedition. They pointed out that the men were not costing the Government anything but were employed at La Verendrye's own expense. The Court was given assurance that La Verendrye was anxious not to neglect anything that would help make the expedition successful. The writers of the letter agreed with Father Charlevoix, they said, that the main purpose of the venture must never be lost sight of ; and they showed that they understood something of what was ahead of La Verendrye, for they added for the information of the Court, (which might expect results too soon),—"There may be delays working among tribes with which the French are unacquainted yet. The Sieur de la Verendrye may have to linger among some of them".

The letter from the Governor and the

Intendant as well as the one written by La Verendrye from Fort Michillimakinac reached France in time, and the independence and aggressiveness of the Explorer evidently impressed the Court favorably. At all events the French Council of Ministers had no objection to La Verendrye's being appointed a concessionaire. They recalled the fact that both his father and mother belonged to influential old families and admitted that he had borne himself manfully at Malplaquet. Besides which, being far from unintelligent statesmen, they appreciated what it would be worth to France to seek the trade of spicery by a shorter way. Their stores of silks and ivory came from the Orient, and to have an alternate waterway to Asia for times of war when there was no thoroughfare for French boats across the Mediterranean would mean a great deal.

So Their Highnesses were willing to grant this most patrician of all coureurs du bois whatever advantage he might gain by having a monopoly of business with the North-West savages. The Government would still have the power to fix small prices on the beaver-skins it bought from him and high prices on the beads, axes, blankets and kettles sold to him for trading with the Red hunters.

The Council of Ministers no doubt thought itself comfortably rid of the whole

matter, though one hopes that when Canadian affairs were discussed at the functions given in the homes of the great reference was made now and again to the valorous Adventurer, La Verendrye, and his expedition. It must be conceded in explanation of the Court's far from handsome treatment of La Verendrye that the statesmen of France were undecided yet whether or not the Colonies were worth the thought spent on them. There were endless complaints and counter-complaints from Canada to be dealt with and unimaginable difficulties in learning at such a distance which side was in the right, for messages one way took anywhere up to fifteen weeks in transit. There were quarrels between governors and intendants; rivalries among Quebec, Three Rivers and Montreal; jealousies among concessionaires; conflicting statements from those who wanted revenue made by the sale of liquor to the Red men and those who wanted no fire-water sold to them. In exasperation the King of France once wrote to Frontenac, "Through all my kingdom I do not hear of so many difficulties."

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## CHAPTER X

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### MAKING HISTORY AT LAKE OF THE WOODS

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We have seen thee when green April,  
Starred with trilliums, danced adown  
Misty lanes where purple alders  
Cast aside their robes of brown.

We have caught thee on a hillside  
Sleeping, splendid in the glare—  
Saw the Noon, thy lover, weaving  
Summer sunlight in thy hair.

Silent Beauty of our Northland;  
When the plains lie white and bare,  
We have seen auroral rainbows  
Fling thy banners on the air.

—A. M. STEPHEN,  
"Canada" in The Land  
of Singing Waters.

THE SIEUR DE LA JEMMERAYE and Jean-Baptiste left Fort St Pierre (Fort Frances) at the end of May, 1732, taking what furs they had collected during the winter by trading, to go back to Kaministiquia (Fort William) to talk over future plans with La Verendrye. Before leaving they told the Indians at Fort St Pierre that they would soon return and that the Chief of the entire expedition would be with them. The trip up and over the height of land and down the Pigeon River was rapidly made and they had

a very re-assuring recital to offer the Commandant and the men who had been with him. The latter were now in a mood to proceed whenever directed. The do-nothing life had lost its appeal long before the nine months were over.

Jean and a number of the men were sent on eastward across Lake Superior to Fort Michillimakinac with the furs they brought from Fort St Pierre. They were to bring from that place the supplies of maize and coffee, shirts and necklaces, axes and spear-heads and other presents and merchandise for the Indians and the articles needed for the camps that were to be sent in the spring by La Verendrye's partners in Montreal.

La Verendrye, with his sons, Pierre and François, the Sieur de la Jemmeraye, Father Messaiger and others of the expedition in seven canoes, started westward from Kaministiquia on June 8, 1732, (one year from the morning they left Montreal), and reached Fort St Pierre on July 14, by which time the quondam timorous members of the party were learning how great were their Chief's powers of diplomacy. A peaceful way was kept open all the distance and it was evident, the Indians in the district were pleased to have the Frenchmen come among them. The site of the fort was approved by La Verendrye, and that it was selected wisely was shown further by the

fact that the Hudson's Bay Company later established a centre, Fort Frances, within a mile or two of Fort St Pierre, the picketed French post built in a meadow amid groves of oak.

As the voyageurs approached Fort St Pierre an animated sight met their eyes, for a couple of hundred Crees had assembled to do honor to the great Canadian who had ventured so many hundred miles in the search for transcontinental routes in craft almost identical with their own light canoes. The Crees had drawn their fifty little vessels up from the edge of the water and their wigwams were in a circle at a short distance from the French trading-post over which the fleur-de-lis was streaming on the breeze.

In all the ways they knew the Indians showed friendliness to the white Chief. There was an exchange of presents and when La Verendrye told them of his purpose to hasten on further west from Rainy Lake to Lake of the Woods the entire company of Indians insisted on escorting him as his body-guard. So it was an impressive flotilla of fifty-seven canoes that took the next stride along the way that was to become a magnificent series of stepping-stones. Down the Rainy River and across Lake of the Woods they went in greater state than that with which La Verendrye had been able to surround himself, and though the



expedition had taken on a wildly barbaric tone it seemed to be of complete naturalness for unknown seas were unlikely to be found except where guarded long by tameless forces. The welcome from the savages meant everything to the white Chief for the success of his explorations.

While the sight of so splendid a procession of canoes made a deep impression on the minds of whatever trappers, fishermen and warriors viewed it, its best effect was on the minds of La Verendrye's own men from the east. Faith in his ability to win unexpected forces to his service was aroused and they had no desire left to revolt a second time against his decrees.

La Verendrye's new fort was built on the south-west shore of the Lake of the Woods. Theoretically the lake is 75 miles long and 75 miles wide. In reality it bears no resemblance to a square. It is all curves and curiously shaped bays and its coast-line is long enough for the boundary of a principality. Lake of the Woods was the most westerly point reached by explorers up to the time that La Verendrye proceeded from there on his search for the mysterious Western Sea. The new fort was named St Charles in honor of the Marquis Charles de Beauharnois, and also in honor of Father Charles Messaiger. The Governor of Canada reposed unbounded confidence in La Verendrye and wished for nothing else so much

as that he could obtain funds for helping the Explorer put into effect his dreams for bringing about the expansion of Canada westward to the border of the continent. As for Father Messaiger, he had helped select the place where the new post was built. He had no premonition then that he would not be able to endure as many seasons of frontier life as the others, but it was not many summers before he had to return to Montreal.

Fort St Charles was situated 100 miles west of Fort St Pierre (Fort Frances), and 325 miles west of Kaministiquia (Fort William on Lake Superior). The new fort was destined to become the most important fur-trading centre under its Concessionaire. It was to be associated too with some of his hours of deepest emotion. Fire has swept away all but a few traces of the old trading-post. Situated on the south bank of the *Angle River of the North-West*, it was built of four rows of timbers about fifteen feet high. It was 100 feet in length and 60 feet wide and had four towers. It was near a bay and looked northwards over a stretch of land where wild oats grew. Within the enclosure, in accordance with La Verendrye's contract with the Governor before he left Quebec, were a log cabin for the commanding officer, one for the

missionary, a gunpowder magazine, a warehouse, and four corner houses. The two gates were opposite each other.

Fishing and hunting were notably good all along the rivers and lakes here. La Verendrye's careful judgment about routes and his gift for lighting upon the most satisfactory locations for business posts have been wondered at by persons of all the generations since his day who have had occasion to travel along the road covered by his men. The thoroughfare he mapped out from Lake Superior to the Lake of the Woods, having the portages improved as he journeyed, has become a part of the international boundary, and for a century the better road of travel he found from Lake Superior to Lake Winnipeg was used by explorers in preference to the routes used earlier.

At the Lake of the Woods history had already been made by Radisson and his sister's husband, Groseilliers, Jacques de Noyon and the Sieur de la Croix. The two first named pushed their way westward up through Lake Superior, on to the Lake of the Woods and thence made their way to the Nelson River and down to the Hudson's Bay. This was between sixty and seventy years before La Verendrye was stationed at Lake Nipigon.

Around the Hudson's Bay such a wealth of fur-bearing animals was found that Radis-

son and Groseilliers decided it meant opulence for any government or firm that established trading-centres there. They went to Quebec and then to Versailles, to ask the French Government to discuss a proposal with them. But no money was voted for building outposts at such an unconscionable distance. In Paris the pair of *coureurs du bois* met the English ambassador and from him got letters of introduction to certain wealthy men in England. They proceeded to London and were able to present in person their scheme to King Charles, the Merry Monarch, and to persuade some financiers to venture funds for sending them (Radisson and Groseilliers) back in a ketch, the *Nonsuch*, under Captain Zachariah Gillam, which sailed from England on June 3, 1668, and got back to England the next June with its load of furs. Fort Charles, the first English settlement on the Hudson's Bay, was erected while the *Nonsuch* was there. Back to the Bay came the traders again and in a year or two the Hudson's Bay Company was formed. De Troyes and D'Iberville were French-Canadians prominent among those who captured the Hudson's Bay forts for the French repeatedly between the years 1686 and 1718. In the latter year they were all restored to the English by a treaty.

Jacques de Noyon probably seemed to La Verendrye of still more interest than the other

explorers, since he had gone so far as to make inquiries about the Western Sea while he was in the West. De Noyon is the explorer mentioned before as having been born at Three Rivers in 1668. He was hardly twenty years old when he arrived at Fort Kaministiquia and made his way on as far as the Lake of the Woods. He went no further, but he reported: "From the end of this lake there is another river flowing into the Western Sea, according to the natives."

De Noyon had been asked then (in 1688) by the Assiniboines to accompany them with a party of 100 men to ~~wage war~~ on a nation who were short and stout and who rode on horses. It was told to de Noyon that it would take five months to go to their country and back, going down a fine river; and that after reaching the high and low tide of the river it took three days to reach the sea. It is believed now that what the Assiniboines (a branch of the Sioux) saw were Spanish settlements perhaps at the mouth of the Mississippi; or perhaps inland, for the Spaniards were not always by the shore, and the tides may have been a myth from fertile Sioux imaginations. The Bow Indians had got mules and asses from the Spaniards long before La Verendrye's time. In 1641 Ferdinand de Soto, the Spanish explorer, set out from Florida with about 1000 men in search of silver and gold, and they

reached the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers. The savages roamed far and wide and may have been in Spanish settlements even if the white men had not visited them. In inter-tribal legendary affairs it was simple enough to confuse geographical directions.

De la Croix was stationed at Lake Nipigon about the time La Verendrye was born. The trading-posts there dated from 1678, 1684 and 1686. As early as 1717 (ten years before La Verendrye was sent to Lake Nipigon) the French Naval Council had it on record that de Noyon, de la Croix and their followers had reached the Lake of the Woods. It was stated that this lake was the highest of any known on the continent and also that "there is a river flowing from this lake to the Western Sea on which ships can sail". After taking part in de Noyon's expedition, de la Croix was returning to his post at Lake Nipigon in a canoe with two paddlers when he was caught in a sudden storm that upset the canoe. The two canoe-men managed to cling to the boat but La Croix was carried away by the river and drowned.

The friendly overtures made between the 200 Cree warriors centred at the Lake of the Woods and La Verendrye's party were the beginning of amiable relationships. The Crees said there were sixty other warriors of their tribe at Lake Winnipeg.

During the summer of 1732 the chief anxiety on La Verendrye's part was for the safety of his son Jean who had gone from Kaministiquia (Fort William) to Fort Michilimakinac beyond Sault Ste. Marie, down the St. Mary's River and at the point where the waters of Lake Huron and Lake Michigan mingle. Never elsewhere did the birch-bark canoes look so helpless, so completely at the mercy of winds and waves, as on Lake Superior. The boats were 25 or 30 feet long, and four or five feet wide, with ribs of cedar-wood. The roots of the spruce tree were used for sewing the birch-bark, and the gum of the pine-tree for tar. Extra bark and gum and spruce fibre were always carried for repairing the vessels when an unfriendly rock in a rapids had been struck. Hair's breadth margins were risked by the voyageurs with the sang-froid belonging only to those who had measured their skill with the speed and windings of the torrents from the time they first had strength enough to use a paddle. But however marvellous the skill of the canoe-men, Lake Superior had its dangers for the most expert among them, and La Verendrye's fears for the safety of Jean and his associates became grave when he thought allowance had been made for every delay that could be caused by bad weather or mistaken detours either to Jean's canoe-men or to those bringing the

goods from Montreal to Michillimakinac. At last as there was still no sign of Jean and his men, La Verendrye had his lieutenant, the Sieur de la Jemmeraye, leave for Lake Superior to learn what they could of Jean's party. It was November 12 of that year (1732) when La Jemmeraye, Jean-Baptiste de la Verendrye and the others arrived at Fort St Charles (on the Lake of the Woods). They showed up on foot for they had been overtaken by winter and had to leave their canoes for the time in a hiding-place twenty-five miles east of the fort.

La Verendrye warmly welcomed his son and nephew and their men. Their safety meant a great deal to him and to the Adventure. But the news they brought was serious. The spring supplies had not come from Montreal though Jean waited day after day in the hope of their appearing. Then, when the summer had worn on without the canoes arriving, he decided to wait for the autumn consignment, for he knew what dependence the expedition placed on the stores with which he was expected to be laden. But instead of the four canoe-loads promised for the fall only one canoe-load arrived. This act of negligence on the part of those in Montréal who promised the expedition backing hampered it sadly. But the lack of supplies was not yet insupportable, and La Verendrye's nature was resilient. To



dwelt much on wrongs committed against him was never one of his traits ; besides, his thoughts were turned steadily westward now that his mind was relieved as to the safety of his men.

As winter intervened, the Explorer had no choice but to devote his time once more to fur-trading and to intercourse with the Indians, especially those from the unknown tracts westward who could add to his information about what conditions he needed to be ready to meet when he continued his course.

When the spring of 1733 came with its softening airs and melted the ice in lake and river there were furs again to be despatched to Fort Kaministiquia and on across Lake Superior to Michillimakinac. La Verendrye's purpose had been to go on from Fort St Charles on the south-west of the Lake of the Woods, canoeing across the lake the four or five days' journey to the present site of Rat Portage then down the Winnipeg River to Winnipeg Lake, to build the third of his forts. But when the movements of all his men were talked over the conclusion was reached that with some of them gone with the canoes to Michillimakinac, some staying to look-after the business at Fort St Pierre on Rainy Lake, and others at Fort St Charles on the Lake of the Woods, it would be unwise for La Verendrye and the ten or eleven men who could be spared

to proceed west with him to make the venture. He was persuaded to undertake nothing till the canoes got back for he could not afford to imperil the success of the expedition.

Two years had passed since La Verendrye left Quebec and he decided to have the Sieur de la Jemmeraye make a trip eastward with news of what progress had been made and to let the Governor known at first hand about the costs connected with building the forts and administering them. With La Verendrye's memoir was sent a map of all the land west of Lake Superior that had been traversed, and a description of the next instalment of territory to be crossed, so far as its contours and characteristics could be surmised from the Red men's tales. An account was given, too, of the relationships the French had established with the Indians of the West, and much that was definite about the tribes and their numbers. Jemmeraye was commissioned, too, to use his utmost powers to prevail upon their partners in Montreal to lend faithful allegiance to the enterprise on which La Verendrye was expending all his energies, and which, if it was carried to success, could not do otherwise than bring great glory to the Governor's Court and the King's.

From the Crees La Jemmeraye was to carry to the Governor two belts of wampum to show the Crees would be obedient to the

French Father in everything, and in token of their submission and loyalty. One belt was to represent the Crees as a barrier for the French against the Sioux and a pledge that the road to Kaministiquia would always be made easy for the French and their allies. The other belt was to stand for Fort St Charles and the joy of the Crees in having the French among them there.

La Jemmeraye left Fort St Charles on May 27, 1723. The letter to the Governor written by La Verendrye on May 21 to be despatched through his nephew read in part as follows :

" I have the honor to send my nephew to you to inform you of what I have performed and the discoveries I have made since my arrival in this region. I was not able to establish a fort at Winnipeg Lake last year owing to difficulties caused by savages blocking the road and also owing to the impossibility of finding men willing to stay there and run the risk of starvation. Moreover, canoes coming from Montreal would not have been able to get to us the same year. They did not arrive at Fort St Charles till the ice was beginning to form.

" By the advice of Father Messaiger I have established myself on the west side of the Lake of the Woods, nearly 200 leagues from Kaministiquia, at the mouth of a river. There

is good fishing and hunting and quantities of wild oats grow here. There is excellent land cleared by fire and I am now putting it in seed.

"All the savages around here are very fond of war. I stopped their fighting last year, but this year I had to let them go on with it. I forbade them, though, to go among the River Sioux to fight, and this they promised not to do. They are all going in the direction of the prairies. I leave my nephew to inform you of the situation of our fort and the one at Rainy Lake.

"The wild oats which we found in abundance here have enabled us to save the corn we brought up last autumn for seeding, so that we shall not have to buy any more at Fort Michillimakinac."

The writer of the letter adds careful details about the portages between Lake Superior and Lake of the Woods, stating exactly what improvements he had caused to be made. He speaks, too, of having his men in safety from the Sioux so far as he could be sure of that. No Sioux had come to that neighborhood for two years for warlike purposes. La Verendrye had sent the Sioux a collar and a pipe of peace to turn their minds still more in the direction of peaceful relationships.

The Explorer wrote a post-script for his letter the second day before La Jemmeraye

left. He desired the Governor to understand that while he and his sons had put their slender resources into this venture it was the merchants who would have golden returns. So one sentence from the note written on May 25 runs, "I venture to hope, Sir, that you will be good enough to take into consideration the expense to which I have been put up to the present time for the establishment of the posts, where in course of time we may hope to collect a large quantity of furs."

Father Messaiger went back to Montreal with the Sieur de la Jemmeraye. The physique of the Jesuit missionary was not equal to the severity of the western winters passed in the comfortless forts and he desired to be released from his duties as chaplain of the expedition. Added to his ill-health there was the fact that the Crees whom he came west to instruct did not make satisfactory parishioners for they were constantly on the move. Wherever game and fish were thought to be most plentiful was their temporary home. Father Messaiger had been in Canada less than ten years prior to coming west and had not managed to acclimatize himself. After he went back with the Lieutenant of the expedition he passed two or three years in invalidism and later taught in colleges in Quebec. He did not recover health

and by 1749 his infirmities were such that he returned to France. His death took place at Rouen in 1766.

The Sieur de la Jemmeraye, with Father Messaiger and the canoe-men got to Montreal on September 20, (1733), and the Lieutenant went on to Quebec where he reported to the Governor, the Marquis de Beauharnois. His engaging manner and straight-forward account of the progress of the expedition won the liking and respect of both the Governor and the Intendant, and again a letter went forward to the Minister in charge of French Colonies in Canada having the signatures of Beauharnois and Hocquart. They wrote on October 10, less than three weeks after La Jemmeraye's arrival, requesting that now the French Government take over the responsibility of financing all further explorations. They stated that La Verendrye and his partners had already expended 43,000 livres over and above the fur sale proceeds and that a few of their men were still unpaid. The voyageurs could not be asked to go further unless they were given their wages, nor would the merchants provide the necessary articles for trade with the Indians unless they had payment for whatever had been supplied. They also informed His Highness that, with his forts now built, the Sieur de la Verendrye could carry on his enterprise for three years more if

30,000 livres were placed at his disposal, and if he were given furnishings that could be supplied from the King's stores. They called the attention of the Minister, the Marquis de Maurepas, to the fact that the Sieur de la Jemmeraye said La Verendrye and his associate would be unable to carry on the enterprise unless the King provided the means.

The Beauharnois-Hocquart letter to Versailles told of the two collars brought from the Indians to Quebec as pledges of loyalty. The map sent by La Verendrye was forwarded with the letter. The information was sent on that one Indian chief intended to stay near the Explorer and even was going to raise corn, seed of which had been given to him by the French. The letter went on to supply all the news from the West that might stir the interest of the Minister of the Navy :

"None of the Assiniboine tribe at first came near the fort at the Lake of the Woods, for they had been scared off by being told the French wanted to eat them, and that for this purpose they were to be chased by Sioux and Saupteaux; but their fears have been dispelled, and the chief of the Crees begs the Sieur de la Verendrye to count these savages who are allies of his nation among his children, and assures him they will shortly come and join him.

“The Sieur de la Jemmeraye is to start again, as soon as the snow melts, for the Lake of the Woods, where he expects to arrive in August, and in September he will leave that place to go and winter 150 leagues further west ; and, after wintering there, he will leave in the spring of 1735 for the nation of the River of the West, 300 leagues from the Lake of the Woods.

“They say that these people have Indian corn and fields of melons, pumpkins and beans ; they have horses and cats, and they build houses of wood and mud. They are said to dress in one hide, and to use earthen pots. The story goes that they have some large axes all worn away by use ; that they never make war on any nation but are always on their guard to defend themselves when attacked. The Crees and Assiniboines have constantly made war on them and have captured several of their children from them. The Sieur de la Jemmeraye bought three of these captive children and brought them to Montreal. He says he has seen these children playing together, that in their games they neigh like horses, and that when they saw cats and horses in Montreal they said they had animals of the same kind at home.

“The Sieur de la Jemmeraye says that the prevailing winds are westerly and very rainy which leads him to conjecture that they



come from the Sea ; he declares he has spoken to twenty different savages in private and at different times to see if their stories would agree, and that they have always told him the same thing ; or if their accounts have not agreed it has been on the subject of the animals they say they have seen on their travels. The Crees and Assiniboines have made peace with that nation and the Crees have promised La Jemmeraye and the Younger La Verendrye to conduct them thither where they can get information as to how to descend to the Western Sea, into which, to all appearances, that great river discharges."

But the resumé of the early years of the expedition, and the outline of the desires in La Verendrye's mind for its future, to bring which the Sieur de la Jemmeraye had travelled more than 1500 miles, might as well never have been offered for all it brought to America from the treasury of France.

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## CHAPTER XI

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### THE FIRST GRAIN-GROWER IN THE WEST

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The observation of the calm energetic regularity of Nature, the immense scale of her operations, and the certainty with which her ends are attained, tends irresistibly to tranquillize and re-assure the mind and render it less accessible to repining and turbulent emotions.

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—HERSCHEL.

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**L**A VERENDRYE brought west a supply of Indian corn and peas and hoped to have small harvests from these at the forts. Corn and coffee were the special articles carried for journeys of such length as the explorers made. The weight of foods had to be thought of where portages too liberally marked the way,—and their chance of keeping unspoiled for months at a time. Fish, fruits and wild fowl were added to the larder as luck permitted. The forts depended on wild oats as a substitute for wheat. Bread was out of the question, but the wild oats, well boiled, proved palatable and nourishing.

La Verendrye accepted a great measure of responsibility for the welfare of those among the Indian tribes who could be won to

friendliness with the French. He would have scorned to accept their help in opening up his way to the Ocean without serving them in return by every means in his power. It was partly his solicitous care for his own men and partly his sincere desire for the welfare of red and white men alike in his country, (several hundreds of miles of reaches were literally his country already by right of discovery),—that brought to him the distinction of being called Western Canada's first agriculturist.

For helping make provision for the members of the expedition, as well as for presenting to the Indians in case of need, it was urgent that a good crop of wild grain be harvested each year. But much rain fell in the spring of 1733 and the wild oats so important to the little camp were flooded out. La Verendrye went into farming to the extent of sowing a field of corn and peas. Much of his harvest of corn that summer had to be given to the Indians since they had no harvest of wild oats. But all that could be saved for seed and the ten bushels of peas harvested from his one bushel sown were planted the next spring, and after that there was seed grain to give to the most intelligent and industrious of the Indians for sowing.

“It rained heavily from September 6 to 14”, wrote the Explorer, “so that for a long time the water of the lake was so much dis-

colored that the savages of whom there were a great many at our fort could not see to spear the sturgeon, and had nothing to eat. In this extreme need of theirs I made over to them the field of Indian corn I had sowed in the spring. The savages thanked me greatly for the relief thus offered to them."

The troubles of the Red men were not of long duration, for a later memorandum in La Verendrye's diary states, "From September 16 (1733) up to Christmas we have had the most beautiful weather imaginable; bright sunshine every day and no wind. All the savages had great hunting up to Christmas, there being no snow."

From the demonstration they watched of the value of farming La Verendrye had hopes of the knights of the bow and arrow trying their hand at crop-raising. As well as giving them greater security from starvation and teaching them thriftiness and how to possess home comforts, farming responsibilities would lessen their temptation to be off on the war-path.

One finds pleasure in learning that during his lifetime La Verendrye had the satisfaction of seeing results, microscopical though they were, from the agricultural phase of his venture. In fact, the following summer he wrote: "I have induced two families of

Indians, by earnest solicitation, to sow maize ; I trust the benefits they will derive therefrom will induce others to follow their example ”.

The advantage of being less dependent upon Nature for food, at least to the point of aiding her by giving the seed a favorable planting, did appeal to the Indians there and to this day on the Reserves near Fort St Charles the descendants of La Verendrye's allies raise large fields of cereals. How the heart of the Explorer would have glowed within him could he have dreamed that in two centuries the agriculturists of the lands he was opening up would be producing the finest wheat in the world and measuring it by the hundreds of millions of bushels !

Two weeks after La Jemmeraye and Father Messaiger started for Montreal, La Verendrye was visited at Fort St Charles by 300 warrior Monsonis, and the next day 500 Crees joined them also wearing war-paint. They came to consult the Explorer. Hereditary hatreds were nursed by the northern Indians, the Crees, Monsonis and Assiniboines, against the southern tribes, the Sioux and the Sauteaux. To have them strike out on the war-path was the one thing La Verendrye did not want. He desired to avoid having murderous proceedings going on anywhere throughout the West, and he had special reasons for wanting primeval peace and quietness to brood

over the area between his forts and his Mer de l'Ouest. Had he not from the time he was sent first to Fort Nipigon tried to persuade the Government to lend a hand in keeping muzzled the tigers of Sioux? Even if it did not sound the death-knell of his project to have the Indians around him deeply embroiled, it would interfere seriously with the fur-trade that had to supply the sinews of exploration.

Invited to the councils of the Redskins, La Verendrye advised them to lay down their arms. As the most appealing argument to that effect he could make to their untutored minds, and to win them for firm friends, he made them gifts of flint-locks, gun-powder, knives, daggers, tinder-boxes and tobacco.

The presents from the Commander of the Post were accepted but his advice to the Indians to keep off the war-path was unwanted. Directly after the council was over one of the Monsonis had the scalp of a fugitive enemy, and the 500 Crees pursued their march through prairie country towards the camps of the Sioux. After three weeks' travelling the Crees saw slender spirals of smoke rising from a Sioux village. But, with the suddenness the Crees planned to display in attacking the village, they themselves were surprised by thirty Sioux warriors who sprang from some hiding-place. Four of the Crees fell dead. The Cree forces flashed into action and the

Sioux fled into a thick bluff on the plain. One side fighting in the open and the other from the wooded vantage-ground, the attack was kept up without parley till darkness fell. Then in a lull the Cree chief bethought himself of asking with whom he had the honor to be fighting.

"The French Sioux", came the answer.

"We are French Crees", said the first chief. "Why do you kill us? We are children of the same father".

The bloodshed ended there. Four Crees had been slain and twelve Sioux. The Sioux were those from Fort Beauharnois on the Upper Mississippi and there traded with the French. Both they and the Crees who had had commerce with the French at the forts in the lake and river country for the last two years or more, instead of paddling north to the English posts on the Hudson's Bay, decided they had better cease firing on each other lest the survivors might have a reckoning to make with the French chiefs. The Crees made their way back to La Verendrye at Fort St Charles.

Three canoes from Fort Kaministiquia loaded with merchandise on August 10 (1733) reached Fort St Charles, which was by this time the most important post in the West. On August 29 there arrived 150 gaily-colored canoes each carrying from three to five Crees

or Monsonis. They brought moose and buffalo meat, bear grease and wild oats to sell to La Verendrye in exchange for the precious articles from France.

Such August days ! The fort and its environs presented a sight virile and stirring. The intense blue and gold and green of the whole world formed a coloring suited to the intensity of the hopes that filled the Explorer's mind. There, hundreds of miles beyond the fringe of civilization, steadily he kept aflame his love for Canada and his passionate hope of winning for his King and Country the immortal distinction of crowning the magnificent discoveries of the last two and a half centuries by unravelling the deepest secret of the continent. A masculine world it was in which La Verendrye enacted his great odyssey, and immeasurable forces of Nature when winter descended were ranged over against his pitifully lean resources, while the Red man was to be reckoned with at all seasons. But La Verendrye never made lamentation for the security of his home down by the St Lawrence. From the first he had known it was not a child's task he had undertaken. He did wish that the Governor, the Marquis de Beauharnois, might spend a summer in the unspeakably desirable country he had found west of the Great Lakes, and that the eastern merchants associated with the enterprise might be led to



understand how illimitable were the possibilities of the West. What conception could they have of the scenic marvels, the winelike air, the riches of woodland and river, the agricultural promises, they whose only thought associated with the West was of furs since all they had seen of the West were the peltries? La Verendrye at least could envision the West of the future and it was his special duty and his glory to guard well his incomparable Inamorata, his dream of finding the Western Sea.

Since none of the men were to proceed with a summer exploration trip westward till the arrival of the canoes from Fort Michillimakinac and those of La Jemmeraye from his 2650-mile trip to Quebec and back, (and winter would intervene before he could even start back), and as their provisions were low, La Verendrye had twenty of his men paddle across the lake to Grassy River, about 65 miles from Fort St Charles, to try their luck at making a living for themselves, and getting facts from the Indians there that might stand the party in good stead on the great adventure that was always tantalizingly just a little ahead, the expedition to the Sea. This party of twenty were given nets and flintlocks and they put in a not unenviable season. Hunting and fishing were unrivalled that year and when they came back to Fort St Charles with the break-up of

the ice the first of May, 1734, they were in health and high spirits. In they autumn they had caught more than 4,000 whitefish, trout and sturgeon,—assuming that fishermen's records need not always be classed as fiction.

On the whole the summer of 1733 sped swiftly and happily by for the Explorer. In retrospect it must have seemed exquisite by contrast with summers to follow. One finds oneself watching sharply for indications that there were delightful experiences for La Verendrye here and there. The great hope of discovering the Western Sea, and his uncomplaining fortitude while trying to change that hope to an actuality, make of La Verendrye a person for whom one desires whatever could offer gratification. Besides, there is the recognition of deep indebtedness to the memory of the Canadian whose explorations of virgin forest and prairie were of empire proportions. One can but trust he knew compensations for the months of dangers and hardships he underwent, and make an effort to do justice to the living who belong to his spiritual hierarchy.

La Verendrye was becoming short of goods and on September 8 he sent one of his sons on the 200-mile trip to Fort St Pierre to meet six canoe-cargoes coming from Montreal for furnishing the forts and provisioning them. Each additional canoe-man could help make the travelling the more speedy. The

first four canoes sighted Fort St Charles on September 28 and the other two came four days later, escorted by all the Monsonis who were in the country, each tribesman wanting to purchase something from the treasures in the hold of one canoe or another.

Martin Urtubise came to Fort St Charles in the summer of 1733 to join in the enterprise. He had unusual gifts and for the winter of 1733-1734 he was put in command of Fort St Pierre with eleven men under him and with his post supplied with the necessary merchandise and victualling.

During the winter of 1733-1734 twenty-three families of Crées stayed near Fort St Charles. Among these were La Martre Blanche and his five wives, or slaves. The ancient arrow-maker became warmly attached to the Discoverer. He had spent more than 100 years in the heart of the continent and had never known anyone half so engaging as this courtly Canadian. The old man's instruction to his squaws and his camp-followers were that they should always cultivate friendship with these clever and charming Palefaces. Chief Blanche was still vigorous and of sound judgment. La Verendrye gave him extra presents and clothed his five wives and three children and furnished tobacco and food for the whole household till May.

Nightly darkness settled down early over the great, lone land and the three little companies of white men,—twelve at Fort St Pierre, twenty at Fort St Charles, and twenty wintering at Grassy River. The French-Canadians knew how to make the best of each other's company and they found no monotony in a winter's repetition of the old chansons. They were more than 1300 miles from their homes, and had no means of travelling except snowshoeing. Not a vestige of news of the rest of the world trickled in except when Indian runners brought word of some blood-curdling horror from one encampment of savages or another. Yet the days held fascination and the winter on the whole proved to be not so destitute of results as the two previous winters.

Between Christmas and New Year's two Monsonis arrived at Fort St Charles bringing La Verendrye a letter from Martin Urtubise telling him that 300 Monsonis near Fort St Pierre were singing their war-songs and would soon be off southward to fight against the Sioux and Saulteaux. This would mean 300 fewer trappers and hunters in the Rainy Lake district, and a proportionate increase in the dissatisfaction among La Verendrye's business partners in the east. The Explorer gave a bead necklace to each of the Indian messengers and some tobacco. He asked the men to tell Monsieur Urtubise and their

tribesmen that he would start in fifteen days from Fort St Charles to Fort St Pierre, and he wished them to do nothing till he came. His purpose in putting them off for two or three weeks was to give the winter rigors time to cool off their passion for battle.

It turned out to be particularly fortunate for La Verendrye that he still remained at the fort a time for two days after the messengers left he had a visit from the most important Indians who had been at the posts,—important in relation to his life-long intention of becoming the Discoverer of the Western Sea. The guests were 70 Assiniboines and Crees, six of them tribal chiefs, from Lake Winnipeg. They brought, as gifts to La Verendrye a bundle of beaver-skins and 100 pounds of ex-fat.

These were the first Indians whose acquaintance La Verendrye made from the lake which he hoped to visit soon. It needs little imagination to suggest with what precision he noted every fact they gave him about their settlement. He had a pot-feast of maize and fish prepared for the visitors and made them liberal presents. The list of valuables required on this single occasion is illuminating : to the six chiefs alone the gifts were 12 pounds of shot, 20 pounds of powder, six axes, six daggers, 12 siamese knives, 24 awls, six capots with gilt beads, six dagger hatchets, six collars

of beads, six flags, tobacco, gun screws, beads, vermilion, needles, six shirts, six pairs of breeches, and six pairs of mitts ; and to the other members of the party were presented 60 gun screws, 60 awls, 30 pounds of powder, 40 pounds of shot, 200 flints, 30 packages of tobacco, 20 axes, 60 knives, maize, vermilion; needles and glass beads.

La Verendrye's diary for that day just at the end of 1733 fixes the event at the fort very clearly in history. The entry reads in part :

" I am ashamed ", I said, " to have only this amount to give you today, but if you are intelligent you will come back to see me with all the people of your villages after their hunting, so that you may be in a position to have your wants supplied by the trader. Do not come with empty hands as you did the first time ". This made them smile. I told them the intention of the collars was to smooth all the roads to my fort, and that the flags were for them to rally under and declare themselves children of the French and not of the English ; that I would receive them far otherwise when I saw them coming like clever people, that is to say, with a lot of packages of furs. I added, " My children, I have with me a blacksmith who knows how to make axes, knives, guns, kettles and everything else, but he lacks iron, and it is difficult to bring it from Montréal on account of the length of the

journey. Is there no one among you who has some knowledge of iron? The color of it does not matter; iron of any color would be good to have."

The interpreter said he knew of several iron mines; one was five days' journey from our fort. Holding up my fire-shovel he said that the iron of that mine gave a still clearer sound, and he told of other ores they knew,—some of them yellow, hard, in grains and flakes, sparkling like the sun; and he said a stream passes through the middle of this yellow 'iron' and deposits sand of the same color.

On the margin of La Verendrye's diary the question was written: "Might not this be the metal for which the chemists have been searching so long without success, or that metal that is the lodestone of the human heart?"

The Explorer asked his visitors to bring him samples of all these ores. He gave them news about Canada and France. These Crees and Assiniboines from Lake Winnipeg came to Fort St Charles for the purpose of asking that they might be adopted as children of the King of France. The chiefs said their nation was made up of seven villages with as many as 900 cabins in some of these, and none of the villages had fewer than 100 cabins. La Verendrye arranged for a council to be held

the last day of December and his promise to have their nation enrolled among the children of the father of the French was made during the ceremonies. It was promised, too, that a party of Frenchmen would visit them every year bringing them all the articles they liked so much.

Vigilant as ever to secure information about what lay between his forts and the Western Sea, La Verendrye inquired of his newly-made acquaintances from the West if they knew the Mandans, and if they were like themselves. They told the Commandant that the Mandans were taken for French and that their houses and forts were very much like those the French built except that the roofs were flat with earth and stones over them ; that they used double rows of stakes on their forts, and had cellars where they kept Indian corn in wickerwork baskets ; men and women worked in the fields, excepting only the chiefs.

The Assiniboine interpreter did not know any words of the Mandans' language, but insisted they spoke and sang like the French. He said they had kettles of sandstone, with a kind of lacquer on the inside and wicker-ware neatly made. Their nation did not extend to the Sea.

The Mandans were described as tall and white with red or light chestnut hair. They walked with their toes turned outwards, and



wore skins worked in colors. A kind of jacket, with trousers and stockings of the same material, was worn. The boots seemed to be of one piece with the stockings. A Mandan woman wore a long gown, a kind of tunic that reached down to the ankles, with a girdle and apron, all of finely worked leather. She arranged her hair in coils on her head.

That the Mandans were an industrious nation was one fact brought out. They sowed corn, beans, peas, oats and other grains ; and they raised horses, goats, turkeys, hens, geese and ducks. Their food was Indian corn and bear meat. Ditches surrounded their forts and there were subterranean passages to the river. Their weapons were the bow and arrow, buckler, axe and dart. At the ends of the chiefs' lodges were ox-heads with ornamental carvings, two of these for each house. " Apparently the coat of arms of the nation", is the diarist's comment.

Modes of signalling were used by the Mandans, according to the warriors from Lake Winnipeg, a trumpet being requisitioned ; and they made small canoes of skins propelled by a double-bladed paddle on their river that was twenty arpents wide. A kind of snake was known to the Mandans that was two or three feet long, and in color nearer black than gray. On its head were two horns, a finger in length,

but the serpent was not harmful unless attacked or walked on ; and the nation knew a herb that cured one when bitten by the snake.

Four months before, the Assiniboinés had been among the Mandans, so they told the Commandant, and the Mandans had asked them to tell the French chief they would like to see him or any of his people. La Verendrye explained that it would be impossible for him to go to see the Mandans in less than a year for most of his men were going to Montreal to get a new supply of goods for the Indians in the district and to let the father of the French know everything that was going on in the West so he could send new word back to his children and whatever instructions he wished.

The Assiniboinés stayed with La Verendrye seven days, leaving on January 5, 1734. The Commandant asked them to think over letting him have two of their chiefs, or more if they were willing, to go to see the French Father at Quebec, that on their return they could tell the rest about the French and how much power they had and how they received the Assiniboine chiefs.

On the condition that two Crees were taken along at the same time and that they would be under the leadership of one of the La Verendrye sons who spoke their language they promised to talk it over when they got

home. The Commandant accepted their proposition and gave them two bags of corn before dismissing them.

Three Frenchmen and four Monsonis came to Fort St Charles from Fort St Pierre on January 12, the day on which La Verendrye had promised to leave. They brought him another letter from Martin Urtubise saying there was extreme need of his hastening to Fort St Pierre in spite of the fact that it was in the depth of winter and that he would have to walk the entire two hundred miles. Nothing but his presence could hold back 400 Monsonis who had made up their minds to avenge many wrongs suffered at the hand of Sioux and Saukteaux. He said some of the old squaws were never done mourning the death of tribesmen who had become victims of the hostile southerners.

La Verendrye and his son, Jean-Baptiste, five of their men, a Cree chief, a Monsonis chief, four women and few other natives set out January 16 at seven o'clock in the morning to make the hard journey to Fort St Pierre, carrying food and arms. Nothing but the immense danger to his project would have led La Verendrye to ask anybody to brave the dangers and discomforts of such a midwinter excursion.

When they had travelled a week they reached some Monsonis cabins where a band

of warriors were holding solemn conclave. These were invited to go with the party of twenty-three directed by La Verendrye to Fort St Pierre still two days of tramping distant. The invitation was accompanied by presents and many compliments for the chief.

A council was held on January 29 at the house of Urtubise with the French and Monsonis all present and once more there was a distribution of gifts from the French. With the earnestness of a man pleading for everything that he held dear for himself and his country, La Verendrye besought them to try to preserve peace in the land. He talked of the advantage it would be to themselves to remain at their peaceful occupations. He told them the only safeguard against starvation in old age and in poor hunting and fishing years lay in their keeping their young men out of war and gradually influencing them to turn their thoughts to craftsmanship instead of hunting scalps eternally.

But spending time envisaging a prosperous, contented future for their tribe or for their land held no charm for the lusty savages. There were grievances rankling in their bosoms and they thought time enough had been wasted in breathing out threatenings. All the artifice and eloquence of the Discoverer wrung from the chief of the warriors in the end nothing but a promise that they would return

home till the spring. They must then be allowed to carry war into the camp of the Prairie Sioux. La Verendrye had no choice but to agree to the compromise.

With that understanding reached, the Indians returned home and Urtubise felt satisfied he could administer the affairs of the fort for the rest of the winter. La Verendrye stayed on a week longer gathering strength for the nine days' return tramp to his main post, Fort St Charles. The harshness of the east-going trip in the bitterly cold January weather had tried his powers of endurance. His wounds received at Malplaquet a quarter of a century before and believed healed long ago again began to pain him through weariness and the intense cold. But the westernmost rim of the frontier was the only place that held attractiveness for the Discoverer, and he bade good-bye to Urtubise as soon as he felt equal to the trip. He reached Fort St Charles on February 14, (1734).

The day after his return, La Verendrye was visited at Fort St Charles by four Crees sent to him by a chief on Lake Winnipeg. They brought him as presents from their chief a slave and a necklace. Both were accepted and the slave received his freedom and became La Verendrye's servant. A dozen gifts were bestowed on the messengers for themselves and their chief. The request that was brought

from the chief was for La Verendrye to send Frenchmen to settle on the shore of Lake Winnipeg.

The great river running from Lake Winnipeg into the Sea had grown more vague and mythical than when the Explorer first heard of it seven years before while he was at Lake Nipigon. But there was nothing he desired more than to proceed westward to Lake Winnipeg and then beyond it so he readily made the promise to send some of his men in the spring if only the Cree chief would have guides come to Fort St Charles to show them the way.

The messengers left to carry home La Verendrye's answer. They felt sure it would be satisfactory to their chief. In less than a month, (on March 7, 1734), two guides presented themselves, carrying a gift of dried moose meat and bringing another slave for the Commandant of the Fort. The offerings were paid for as before. La Verendrye himself could not leave Fort St Charles with the supplies as low as they were, nor till the Indians east of his main fort were pacified more permanently.

Two of the Frenchmen volunteered for the Lake Winnipeg reconnoitring trip and were off on March 9 without loss of time, only waiting till La Verendrye instructed them in his wishes. The necessity for avoiding trouble

between the French and the Indians was impressed upon the men who were to precede the rest of the expedition to Winnipeg Lake.

Thirty or forty years later an explorer described the Indians around lake Winnipeg as being almost entirely naked, with their bodies painted with red ochre. Every man and boy had his bow strung and in his hand and his arrow ready to attack in case of need. They shaved their heads or else plucked out all their hair except for a spot on the crown the size of a dollar. Their ears were pierced with bones of fish. The women, too, painted their bodies and pierced their ears. They wore leather dresses. The men had two wives each and lent them now and then from one hunting-lodge to another.

A new and quite unthought of difficulty presented itself to La Verendrye on May 7 (1734) for decision. Along with seven Frenchmen who had wintered at Fort St Pierre arrived 400 Monsonis at Fort St Charles armed for war. They began singing their war-song the same night. The war chief presented furs and a collar to La Verendrye and when a council was called his preamble covered the whole series of arguments that were given at Fort St Pierre in the winter. Then to the Commandant he spoke: "At whom are we to strike? If you wish I will tell you the thought of our warriors. I am

chief, it is true, but I am not always master of their will. If you will let us have your son to come with us, we will go straight wherever you tell us ; but if you refuse, I cannot answer for where the blow may fall. I have no doubt you know the thought of our kindred, the Crees. But I do not hide the fact from you that there are several chiefs among us whose hearts are bitter against the Sioux and the Saulteaux. You know some of them kept coming on our lands till the snow fell. If they did not kill anyone it was because they were discovered. Decide what you are going to do ! ”

La Verendrye says : “ I was agitated, I must confess, and cruelly tormented by conflicting thoughts, but I put on a brave front and did not speak of my emotion. How was I to entrust my oldest son to barbarians whom I did not know, whose name even I scarcely knew, to go and fight against other barbarians whose name I did not at all know, nor their strength ? ”

If La Verendrye refused his son to the Monsonis there was reason to think they would call the French cowardly and would not become completely loyal to the French. Their allegiance was greatly needed if the success of the enterprise was not to be endangered. Then, as the chief said, if La Verendrye did not promise what they asked they would not consider his



wishes as to what direction their war-path should take. They might carry the war westward over the ground he wanted kept open and safe for his explorations. La Verendrye seems to have been more deeply perturbed over this crisis than over any in which it was his own life that was at stake. Once more, as at so many critical times in the history of the adventure, he sought advice from the most intelligent Frenchmen at his post. They were all of the opinion that he should grant what the savages asked. They said Jean would not be the first Frenchman to go to war along with savages, and his not being chief of the war-party insured his not getting involved in difficulties with the nation against whom the war-cloud was forming. "Moreover", comments La Verendrye, "my son was passionately desirous of going".

So it ended in La Verendrye's giving his consent, though, as in many another instance, he would not allow others of his men to take the same risks as members of his family took. During all their years in the West, the Commandant and those most closely connected with him themselves bore the brunt of the dangers and hardships.

Full instructions were given to Jean in writing as to how he should deport himself in the Indian councils. These instructions were read publicly as well by way of impressing upon

Jean the responsibility that rested upon himself alone for wise action and by way of there being no act of negligence to regret if harm came from Jean's going with the warriors. Tobacco was distributed among all the Red man, "and thus this great affair was concluded", wrote La Verendrye.

¶ The merchants at the post thought it an excellent opportunity for promoting business and asked La Verendrye to speak to the 660 warrior-savages on the subject of trade. So they were all invited to come into the courtyard of the fort the next morning, (May 9, 1734), and he had seats ready for the fourteen chiefs,—Crees on one side and Monsonis on the other. By way of helping make his meaning clear to his guests, La Verendrye had his men place in the midst a 50-pound barrel of powder, 100 pounds of bullets, 400 gun-flints; awls, knives, screws and steels in proportion, and 30 fathoms of tobacco. Besides these things for the ordinary braves there were special gifts for the chiefs. Jean was asked to take his place at his father's side.

After talking to his audience a while about the advantages of trading with the French, La Verendrye said he was going to Fort Michillimakinac, and perhaps to Montreal, to get a new supply of articles. He named some things he would sell to them in exchange only for the skins of marten and lynx. Beaver-skins,

would buy all the other articles. He wished to spur the natives on to hunting the smaller animals as well as the beaver. He told them the women and children could easily help with trapping the smaller wild creatures. He reminded the Indians that they ought to hunt in the autumn, winter and spring in order not to disappoint the French who bought from them their meat, wild oats, barks, gums, and roots for canoe-repairing.

"As you have obeyed the word of our father", said La Verendrye before dismissing his copper-colored listeners, "I entrust you with my oldest son who is my dearest possession ; consider him as if he were myself ; do nothing without consulting him ; and as he is not as accustomed to fatigue as you though he is equally vigorous, I depend on you to take care of him on the journey."

A little rivalry followed between the leaders of Crees and Assinibonies as to which was to have the honor of Jean's company. The Cree officer rose first and said to La Verendrye, "My father, you know that your son belongs to me and that I have adopted him. His place is in my canoe. There is a warrior to serve him and there are two women to carry his baggage."

Jean thanked the Cree chief, and, addressing the Monsonis, said : "My brothers, do not be vexed, I beg of you, if I embark with

the Crees. We are all marching together ; your cabins are mine and we are all one". Everybody was satisfied with this friendly view.

La Verendrye told the warriors how warfare was carried on in France and showed them his wounds received at Malplaquet. Before he left the conference, La Verendrye had the pleasure of hearing the chiefs say : "Our father, we shall keep quiet while you are away, having your sons with us, and we beg of you, if you go down to Montreal, speak for us to our father, the great chief, as we are among his children."

On May 10 La Verendrye sent off six canoes of furs to Kaministiquia.

On May 11 the warriors came in to take leave of the Explorer. They said their campaign against the Prairie Sioux would last two months and that they would have 1100 or 1200 men in their war-party.

Accompanied by a Cree chief and eighteen huntsmen, the two Frenchmen who had been to the edge of the prairie country returned on the day that Jean and the warriors left Fort St Charles. The Cree chief admitted to La Verendrye that his men had visited Fort York on the Hudson's Bay that spring though it required thirty days to make the round trip. His men wanted to exchange their season's furs for guns and pots and they knew La

Verendrye had none at his posts to sell them. They hoped it would be possible in future for them to trade with the French alone, as being more convenient, particularly if the French were going to build a post on Lake Winnipeg. The Assiniboines had told him the French intended to settle near Lake Winnipeg. The Crees gave this information, said the chief, to the English Governor at Fort York and the reply was that the English were pleased the French were entering the West ; they would get along well together for they were brothers. The English Governor had sent an explicit message : " If you see the French tell them for me to speak no ill of the English, and we will speak no ill of the French." La Verendrye's message in return was that of a courteous French-Canadian.

The Cree chief brought La Verendrye another slave as a gift. La Verendrye offered presents to the chief, and promised to try to have some of the French go to settle among the Crees within two months.

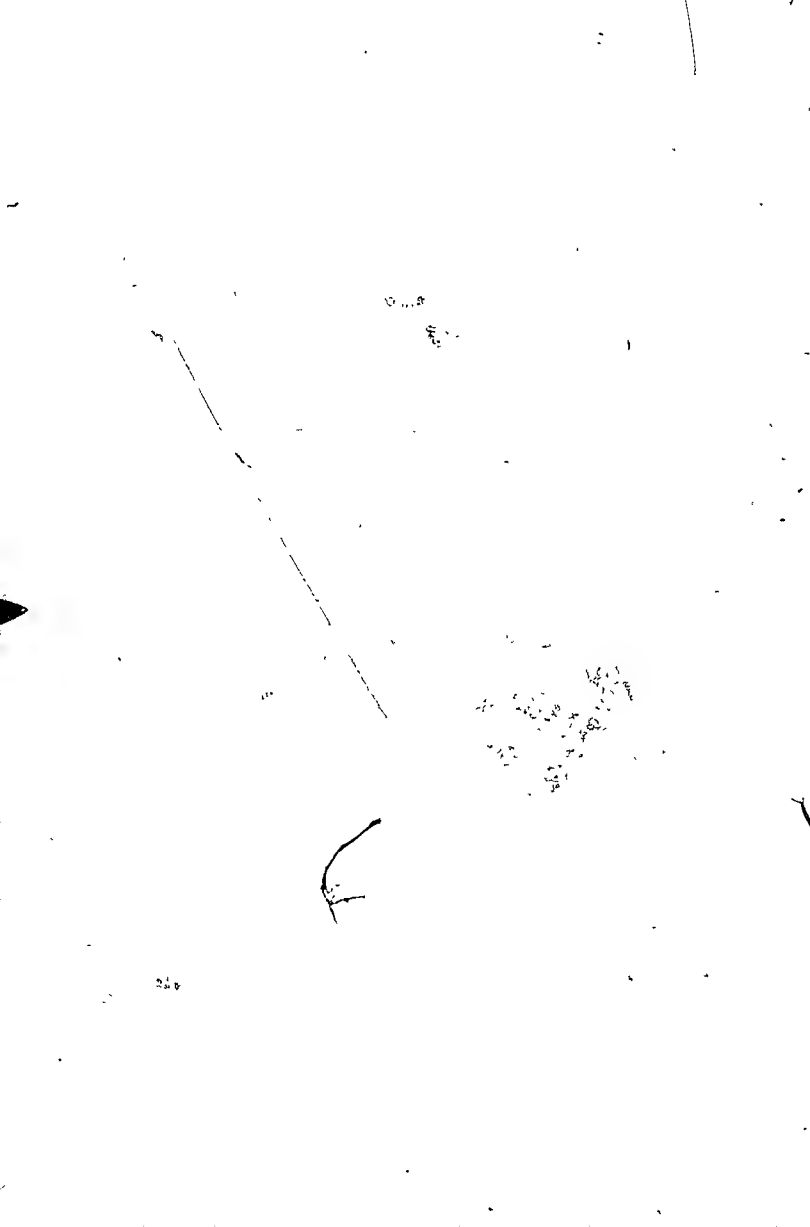
The two Frenchmen who had been west to Lake Winnipeg scouting since March 9 reported to La Verendrye that the most desirable place they had found at which to build a fort was a two days' journey down Lake Winnipeg to the southwest, at the mouth of the Red River. They considered it was advantageous for the transporting of supplies

and as being within reach of many Indians. The Red men's wanderings gave them unequalled knowledge of the conformation of the land, with its best canoe-routes. That a large number of natives clustered in the neighborhood named was in itself indication, they said, of its being favorable as the site of a fort.

So La Verendrye arranged for Cartier, one of his business partners, who reached Fort St Charles from Montreal in the winter of 1733-1734, to leave on June 18, (1734), from Kaministiquia, with three canoes for Lake Winnipeg. He was to build a small fort, a fort one square arpent in size. Cartier was to let the Indians know that one of the La Verendrye sons would arrive there with two canoe-loads of goods at the end of the August moon.

This new fort, Fort aux Roseaux, was built on an eminence about fifteen miles up from the mouth of the Red River on the west bank.

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## CHAPTER XII

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### SEEKING THE SINEWS OF EXPLORATION

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God help thee, Traveller ! on thy journey far ;  
The wind is bitter keen,—the snow o'erlays  
The hidden pits, and dangerous hollow ways,  
And darkness will involve thee. No kind star  
Tonight will guide thee, Traveller, and the war  
Of winds and elements on thy head will break,  
And in thy agonizing ear the shriek  
Of spirits howling on their stormy car  
Will often ring appalling—I portend  
A dismal night.

—H. K. WHITE.

**H**IS WORK having progressed thus far, La Verendrye found it imperative to make a trip to Montreal, Three Rivers and Quebec. His establishments had reached the point of extensiveness where some margin of capital seemed necessary if all of them were to be kept operating. As for his grand project, the adventure for the sake of which he accepted the post at Fort Nipigon in 1727 and almost ever since lived at the far western outposts, it too might gain by his putting before the Governor in person an account of what had been accomplished in three years without the Government's giving a dollar towards promoting the explorations.



The Governor believed in 1731 when La Verendrye first started for Kaministiquia that when he and his associates proved their prowess as explorers, and their seriousness as adventurers, by getting established in districts where white settlers had never yet made their homes, the French King and Court would recognize the service these daring souls were eager to perform for Canada, and for performing which they were brilliantly gifted. He had mentioned the likelihood of the King then looking deferentially upon the fearless Patriot and offering to take care of the financing of further explorations. La Verendrye knew himself now to have a more practical working knowledge of what was essential for going on to unravel the secrets of the West than he had three years before. He also knew the tide of royal approbation of his conduct of affairs should be at the flood. If there was a possibility of its leading on to fortune he chose to take advantage of it that his progress to the Sea might be made with less difficulty and delay than in the past. La Jemmeraye had not returned from Montreal. He had presented the interests of the enterprise, no doubt, in such manner that the Governor understood the magnitude of the task. The Commandant decided to discuss his cause himself now with the King's representative in the hope of winning a hearing so sympathetic that there

might no longer be any difficulty in surrounding himself with men of power and capital keen to help make sure of the party of Frenchmen being the first of all white men to reach the Western Sea.

Second only to the brightness of La Verendrye's reveries when phantoms of newly-found oceans filled his mind came the brightness of his thoughts when dwelling on the splendor of the very real country through which his places of business were sprinkled. He could call to his memory pictures of a hundred unspeakably beautiful scenes between his fort and the Great Lakes ; then there was the bracing climate, the air that lent a feeling of living at the top of the world ; and with the keen, sweet air and the beauty of the forest landscapes varied by countless sapphire lakes and crystalline rivers, were the riches of forestry, mining, fishing and farming to be won by the trying,—six hundred miles of wonderful new areas already traversed by himself and his men, and with as much more beyond Lake Winnipeg again, for anything he had learned to the contrary. It was breathtaking,—but could anyone form a conception of it without having seen the western country for himself ?

France herself, La Belle France for whom La Verendrye would go through another Malplaquet if she required it of him, the entire

land of France measured less than 550 miles in width and 600 miles from north to south ! He had already introduced the fleur-de-lis to tribes spread over as much land as France, without her colonies, comprised. How could King Louis the Fifteenth disregard the chance to reclaim from the savages this virginal territory with its wild distinctive charm ! If he could but make it graphic to the King, only once fire his imagination, move him to send men in force sufficient to tame these inhuman tribes and take possession of the country, without the leader being hampered by managing business posts at the same time and having to be responsible for the security of little companies strung over imperially great distances, he could sing the *Nunc Dimitis*.

The more La Verendrye thought about it, the more confident he felt that the King's favor must flow out towards the men who were pushing back the confines of his possessions in America. In his pride over what his little company had accomplished in its three years in the West and in his own extraordinarily unselfish love for Canada and France, but especially for Canada, he may have overestimated the interest of the kings of the age in their people. All his life-long, in spite of neglect and indifference, coldness to himself and his dreams, and criticism of his expedition, it never occurred to him that, sovereigns in

Europe might be much more deeply concerned about their own safe enthronement, their own power and glory, than in either the happiness of their people or the future of their kingdoms. Nowhere in his correspondence occurs complaint even against the courtiers who should have made it impossible for an unimaginative king to forget for a single day the courageous penetration into western fastnesses on the new continent being led by a Gentleman Adventurer of high French descent, or to forget that he as King had not raised a hand to save this expedition from a starve-crow existence nor indeed from being wiped out.

Having made his decision to go east and report the completion of the three fur-trading posts called for in his contract, at Rainy Lake, Lake of the Woods and Winnipeg Lake, (the last-named would be erected before his canoe could reach the St Lawrence), La Verendrye waited at Fort St Charles till his second son, Pierre, got back (on May 27, 1734) from a trip to Michillimakinac, for Pierre, who was twenty years old now and a cadet in the troops, was to be left in command. Jean-Baptiste, Pierre's older brother, had left three weeks before to go with the Crees and Monsonis war-party on their raid upon the Prairie Sioux (or Dakotas). La Jemmeraye had not returned from Quebec for which city he had left early in the summer of 1733. Pierre was to have

ten men with him at Fort St Charles. Little trading could be done for no merchandise was left at the fort. The Indians' comprehension of business methods went so far as to see the virtue of their being able to get ammunition and other merchandise in advance in the autumn from the French and promising to pay them with furs in the winter, but as yet it fell short of prompting them to bring their products of forest, lake and wild grain-field to the French posts and trust to getting the articles they wanted when the goods arrived.

La Verendrye left on the day of Pierre's arrival. With his five canoes he reached Kaministiquia (Fort William) on June 16, and resting there only three days he started on the next lap of the trip, the 400-mile paddle across Lake Superior, then from Sault Ste Marie to Fort Michillimakinac, where his canoes were beached on July 6.

The Sieur de la Jemmeraye, the lieutenant of the expedition, arrived at Fort Michillimakinac from the St Lawrence cities a few hours later than his uncle and brought the orders of the Marquis de Beauharnois. Great pleasure was felt over the safe coming of La Jemmeraye for he was very personally dear to his uncle and the older Explorer took much satisfaction from his lieutenant's faith in their project and in its arriving at a glorious consummation. The young man's immediate news



possessed nothing heartening, however, He had not been able to secure additional support for the men who were pushing back the frontiers so vigorously.

The orders from the Governor contained nothing to alter La Verendrye's intention of making the trip to the Canadian capital. He gave La Jemmeraye instructions to take command at Fort St Charles, and for Pierre de la Verendrye, Jr., to proceed to the Red River where he would find the new fort either finished or progressing rapidly.

The Sieur de la Jemmeraye had his affairs in order by July 12 (1734) and with his six canoes left Fort Michillimakinac that day for the Lake of the Woods. La Verendrye had left a little sooner with a consignment of furs for the east and got to Montreal on August 16 (1734). His Journal mentions the fact that he was in perfect health and was at ease in his mind about the safety of the men at the posts and about the careful administration of the posts in his absence, "having left to each commandant instructions in writing, according to the orders which I had received from the Marquis de Beauharnois, Governor-General of the whole of New France".

In Montreal La Verendrye tarried only briefly for his reason for being in the east was to make his proud report of achievement to the Governor and use the persuasion of his



three years performance in an effort to have the expedition put more securely out of risk of financial difficulties. In Quebec he had many hours with the Marquis de Beauharnois. The friendship of the Governor and his admiring and constant belief in the brave Officer's final success in discovering the Ocean, and in opening up vast new dominions even if there proved to be no Sea, lend something to the brightness of the tale of the Discovery of the North-West. One is the gladder to give recognition to the encouragement offered to the La Verendrye explorers by the Governor because almost all the rest of the radiance shining around the great event emanates from the performance and the character of the Discoverer and of his sons and their companions. On the practical side, his having the favor and confidence of the Governor meant that La Verendrye could bargain more successfully with the matter-of-fact business men of the East when he had to raise money for his venture in the West.

The Marquis de Beauharnois on October 8 (1734) prepared a report for the celebrated Minister of the Navy, the Marquis de Maurepas, who was in charge of the affairs of the French possessions in America, about the trade and commerce relations La Verendrye had established with the western Indians for a wide radius around the posts strung along 500 miles

of a new canoe-thoroughfare. He sketched the further explorations that were taking shape in the sound and vigorous mind of the valorous Canadian officer in the service of the King of France, and went as far as a Colonial Governor dared in urging that an appropriation be made by the French Government for the project. In closing his letter the Marquis de Beauharnois had the temerity to say : " Permit me to beg of you to urge on His Majesty to bestow some consideration on that officer (La Verendrye) ; I venture to assure you that the zeal he displays in this enterprise can have no other motive than the good of the Colony, and that up to the present time it has been a very expensive thing for him."

The letter to France gave specific information about the outlay La Verendrye had made in the improvement of the portages in the West, and how this resulted in a saving in the wages of the hired men. The Governor's expression of a desire that justice should be shown makes his letter valuable for all time, the more so, of course, to Canadians, because its subject matter concerned the Dominion vitally.

Beauharnois told Maurepas and the others at Versailles :

" I have informed the Sieur de la Verendrye that His Majesty was not disposed to





incur any expense in aid of his discovery. He has represented to me again, and I have knowledge that it is true, that the amount which he and his associates have spent in order to push forward these establishments is much more than any profit they have derived from them. He added that these same associates were not disposed to assume the further expenses that were necessary for following out his project, but that the prospect of final success appeared to him no longer open to doubt. He has overcome the one really essential obstacle by obtaining supplies from merchants who have let him have what he requires though he is still indebted to them for his first equipment.

“The zeal which the Sieur de la Verendrye manifests for this enterprise has seemed to me to proceed alone from a desire to accomplish the discovery of the Western Sea and render his establishments useful to the Colony. It is a matter of established fact that those which he has made in the countries of the nations with which the English were carrying on trade will be of use both in diverting their commerce from English channels and in increasing the trade in furs that is carried on in this Colony.

“The heavy expenses he has had to incur and the debts he is obliged to contract might have discouraged this officer if he had not

flattered himself that His Majesty would take a kind interest in the circumstances of the case. He is facing all difficulties alone, having failed to find any associates who, like himself, prefer the glory of success to the financial advantages that may result from it, other parties feeling strongly that glory cannot pay the expenses involved in the formation of new establishments, particularly of the nature of his.

“The Sieur de la Verendrye expects to start for Lake Winnipeg next spring and to arrange for going to the country of the Mandans the spring following. He will take with him the Sieur de la Jemmeraye and one of his own sons who has great facility in learning the languages of the savages, and who will learn the language of the Mandans so as to be able to act as interpreter with that people when trying to draw from them the information he will require to carry out his ideas regarding the Discovery.”

While in Quebec that autumn La Verendrye placed his Journal in the hands of the Governor-General Beauharnois for sending to the Minister of the Navy, and he himself wrote a letter to that dignitary on October 12 (1734) to accompany it. He narrated the sacrifices which such an enterprise demanded, and informed the Minister that the Governor of Canada had commissioned him to continue his

explorations as soon as the ice melted in the spring of 1735. He stated in his letter that the specific difficulty he faced was to secure money for presents for the Indians through whose lands he would need to travel, frankly saying that he could not raise the money himself except by borrowing. He suggested that the entire sum needed would not be a circumstance to the national treasury, whimsically adding, "But I assure Your Highness it is a very considerable one for me, all the more so from the fact that I am deeply in debt to the supply merchants." He proudly mentioned his youngest son's intention to accompany him when he went back to the West in the spring, and closed with a line written in commonplace way though it now after nearly two centuries possesses power to limn the Canada of Verendryean years, "I hardly suppose I shall be able to give Your Highness any news of my journey for two or three years."

But in spite of the Governor-General's vigorous championing of Canadian exploration and La Verendrye's restrained eloquence it was a lost cause as far as France was concerned. Lesser luminaries revolving around the French Court with no Atlantic distances between left the King and his ministers unmindful of what stars were rising above the far North American horizon.

If La Verendrye's heart had not been on fire irrevocably with longing to know the secrets of the continent and if his sons and nephew and several of the leal young French-Canadians had not enthusiastically attached themselves to him till his resolves were executed (at least to a magnificent degree) the answer that came back from France to the representative in Canada of Louis the Fifteenth would have doomed the long adventure. The minister replied, according to the author of *Heroes of New France*, that "it was not right the king should share in the expense proposed, but that the members of the expedition should be able to keep it going out of the profits they made on furs."

The profits ! As though it had not been made as clear as sunlight at noonday that if profits there were no one was receiving them but the merchants who paid low prices for the beaver-skins and charged high prices for beads and kettles and blankets ! One could wish a gale had driven the sailing-ship to some shore other than America's rather than bring a message that was to fall crushingly on the hopes of one of the boldest wanderers of any century. Was this the sort of encouragement La Verendrye travelled half across the continent to get, at the cost of two summers, when next November 17 he would be fifty years old?

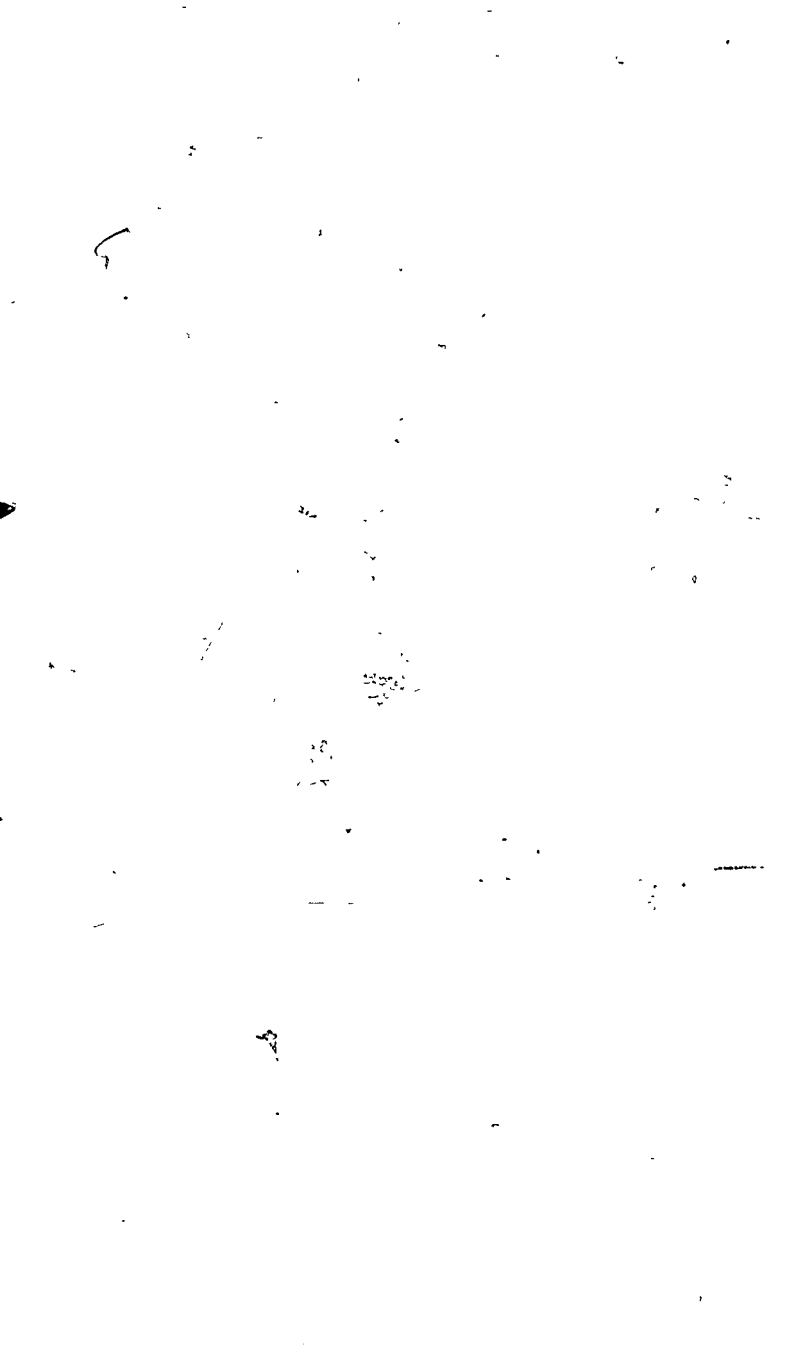
La Verendrye's first expedition had ended with a deficit of \$8,500, a more important sum in that age than it is thought now by men in the service of the Government. The last winter's fur-trade brought only 600 packs in furs. The wages of the men and the cost of equipment for the chain of forts had required more than at first estimated. Though the Marquis de Beauharnois had taken the pains to let the French Court know the signs indicated \$7,500 now would provide the Explorer with the means of finding the Sea the most generous word that came in reply was for the latter to go back to the West and make the money that was required. Many a night's entertainment and many a day's celebration at one of the palaces cost as much as Canada was asking for La Verendrye's purpose, to secure for the French the glory of the discovery of an ocean and the untold advantage it would offer commerce. But the Court did not vote him a dollar, and sixty or seventy years afterwards it was the English who unravelled the secret of those romantic centuries and learned what was at the edge of the continent.

Characteristically, La Verendrye was occupying himself in making the best business arrangements possible for his next expedition to the West even while the Governor was

corresponding with the Court about its just and fair responsibility as to paying the expenses of the explorations.

The announcement that no support was to be expected from the French Government nor its Canadian exchequer did not vanquish La Verendrye's spirit. Henceforth, as heretofore, it would have to be himself and those who volunteered to be his followers against the savages, the hardships, debt, loneliness, whatever the West held that prevented it from being a land of homes for a civilized and cultivated race, and against all the forces that worked in opposition to his making a way to the Western Sea. His resolute will prevailed, and the charm and mystery of the great, lone land. The stars in their courses would have to oppose him before he would believe the destiny of Canada was to be anything but glorious. La Verendrye would keep his fortunes linked with hers come what might.

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## CHAPTER XIII

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### LA VERENDRYE'S SECOND EXPEDITION

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We look back now with a sort of amazed compassion to the old crusading times when warrior husbands and their wives, grey-headed parents and their brave sons parted with the knowledge that it must be months or even years before they could hear even of one another's existence. We wonder how they bore the depth of silence.

—MARTINEAU.

**T**HOUGH THE WINNING of new lands was of national import, whether brought about by warlike or peaceful means, and in all reason should have been financed as such, yet La Verendrye found he could not hope for anything except a renewal of his concession to control the fur-trade over the areas he might explore. This privilege was the only possession he had which could be changed into currency, or into the goods he needed for fitting out a second North-West expedition. In person with business men he talked over the whole proposal of further discoveries and trading with the Indians and succeeded in convincing some of them that there were profits to be made. But before they would consent to let him have



money or supplies they insisted on his making over to them for three years control of all the business he had built up with great labor and risk. Even then, when the Explorer had mortgaged his own and his sons' operations ~~for three years, the merchants refused to be~~ responsible for providing the presents the Commandant had to shower liberally upon the tribes with whom he wished to have intercourse and though whose stamping-grounds he wished to keep always a way open for himself and his men towards the east. He would have to find funds for this purpose where he could. An allowance for presents to an explorer going among hostile tribes of unknown strength when his own forces numbered fifty at their mightiest was as needful as food or water. To be on friendly terms with the Red natives on his whole transcontinental way and never to allow his means of passage homewards to become endangered were necessities graven on his heart. Plentiful presents would shorten the road to the Sea and lengthen the years he could spend at his home peacefully after winning honor for Canada and France.

The merchants who had endorsed La Verendrye's project in 1731 seem not to be the ones concerned in the second expedition, the one beginning in 1735, for La Verendrye says: "Before leaving I had ceded to my tradesmen the privilege of trading and the business of

the posts I had established, the previously interested parties having finished their term."

Describing La Verendrye's fresh business arrangements for this his second expedition westward, the Governor, the Marquis de Beauharnois, reported on October 8, 1735, to the Court : " On the representations the Sieur de la Verendrye made to me, that the enterprise had involved him in heavy losses, which it is certain one is likely to incur in these new establishments, I gave him permission to farm out the posts he had established to certain merchants for a period of three years, on condition that he would not himself do any trading directly or indirectly, so that he might be able to pursue his enterprise with all diligence... The Sieur de la Verendrye has in consequence terminated all relations and settled every matter of business with his associates and divested himself of all commercial interest in the places he has established or may hereafter establish.. The officer in question, (La Verendrye), being no longer occupied with any commerce, and having been furnished by me with the means of re-couping himself for his outlay and the presents he is obliged to make to the tribes by the rental he is deriving from those posts, will have nothing to urge in future as to losses arising from this enterprise.. I may add that.. there is reason to believe that when these posts have been established

thoroughly they will increase considerably the total amount of the fur-trade carried on in this Colony, as well as the proceeds of the licenses that will be issued to voyageurs after the expiration of the three years during which ~~the Sieur de la Verendrye is to have the~~ benefit."

The Governor was a man of wide experience, yet when he said there would be nothing more heard about losses he showed that he still had something to learn of the variety of ways in which money could be lost while one hunted for unknown seas.

On his arrival at home late in the summer of 1734 La Verendrye sent his youngest son, Louis-Joseph, (who was born on November 9, 1717), to Quebec to study mathematics and map-drawing. The youth's desires were for joining his father and three brothers in their adventures, and now that they would be traversing entirely uncharted ground it would be invaluable to have a member of the expedition skilled in making reliable maps for the use of those who were to follow the spear-head of western immigration and for the use of the Government departments.

There was still more gratification for La Verendrye in having his 18-years-old son with him on his western trip than just the fact of having some one along competent to prepare charts and records. Having Louis-Joseph

with him meant that all his sons were now part and parcel of the enterprise, each serving to strengthen his father's position with the men and each ready to set an example of heroic endurance if need be.

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Then there was the charm of having one to talk with who could recount the little intimacies of affairs at their home and among the family relatives and relate the happenings of the three years while he himself had toiled among his saturnine trapping and hunting clientele. Freshness, too, was brought again to the venture with the coming of Louis-Joseph. The eager attitude of his youngest son towards the experiences upon which he was entering restored La Verendrye's own keenness and he forgot his spirit had ever been dulled by disappointments and weary journeys.

While one dwells with profoundest admiration upon the courage and diligence displayed by the Explorer year after impoverishing year, it is a loving employment also to reconstruct in fancy the deep delights he must have known. He was not the man to pose as a martyr,—not he. Nor would he have exchanged his stern years in the West for however comfortable prospects elsewhere. Though La Belle Dame Sans Merci had him in thrall, he was far from being a "palely loitering" knight-at-arms.

One authoritative writer said: "The French-Canadians were the best canoe and



bush-men in the world". Another called La Verendrye and his sons "the most adventurous of all the traders". Fifteen years before La Verendrye reached the West Intendant Begon was looking round him for a man brave enough to build a chain of posts between Lake Superior and Lake Winnipeg. "We ought to try", said he, "to make this discovery with fifty Canadians, who are more fit than any other nationality to accomplish it because they are inured to the hardships of such expeditions and like the work, and they are accustomed also to the way of living followed by the Indians." To recall the superiority of Canadians for undertaking explorations in the wilderness is pleasing in itself. That their good-humor was unflinching in the face of difficulties and that they possessed a flair for coming through riskiest rencontres unharmed are things to be remembered with thrills of pride. They are touched upon here as suggestive of the joyousness which must have tinged the whole adventure. Fitting so easily into the wilderness environment, La Verendrye, the premier of French-Canadian adventurers, must have revelled deeply in the life, and all his old enjoyment in this primitive way of living and in the making of plans for the conquest of further reaches of land was re-kindled by the presence of his youngest son, a new member of the expedition.

While La Verendrye and Louis-Joseph were making their way westward in the early summer of 1735, stroke by stroke, the 1500 miles from Montreal to Fort St Charles, letters written by Jean-Baptiste de la Verendrye and his cousin, the Sieur de la Jemmeraye, were on their way eastward to Quebec.

Jean had not stayed many weeks with the Red warriors but had returned to his father's forts.

When he was at Kaministiquia the middle of June (1734) on his way eastward La Verendrye had met Cartier, one of his partners in trade, and had given him instructions, as has been mentioned, about proceeding to the mouth of the Red River and building a fort at the site decided upon. This had been done, but the Indians later in the summer expressed a complaint that Fort-aux Roseaux was too far from the Lake. To please them this small fort was abandoned, and Fort Maurepas was built in the autumn of the same year on Lake Winnipeg at the mouth of the Winnipeg River. (Four years later Fort aux Roseaux was moved to the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, and it became known as Fort Rouge.)

The letters of Jean and Christophe were written on June 7 and July 23 (1735). The former told of establishing the new fort and gave all the particulars about its situation and

the road by which it was reached, even particularizing that there were thirty portages "but not one difficult one." To his cousin he left the honor of telling of affairs at all the older forts and of giving such fresh information (or myths) as they had gleaned about the Mandans. So much depended upon the ~~friendliness of the Mandans and their intelligence~~ ! What Christophe tells chimes with what La Verendrye had learned and reported already except that Christophe quotes Indians as saying that each Mandan chief had a totem-pole on which the head of an ox was painted at each of the four corners of his house, while the earlier tale was of two of these coats-of-arms for one lodge. There is a little less vagueness this time about the folk between the Mandans and the Mouth of the River of the West. Christophe writes : "It is a very long journey, and there are seven other nations to pass on the way".

The Lieutenant tells in his letter of his cousin, Jean, sending through some Assiniboine travellers a pair of collars to the Mandans as a gift from the French with an inquiry as to whether or not they would send envoys a little distance to meet the French when it became possible for them to visit the Mandans. (This message was delivered through some wandering hunters and met with a friendly reply, asking only that the Mandans might

have word of the date a little in advance and naming a rendezvous to which they would send the envoys).

Christophe's letter informed the Governor of the forts harvesting 600 packages of furs and told him that for lack of men they could send down only 400 packages, "which is quite a loss to us", he commented. This is the nearest he came to complaining of such exasperating fortune. Brave La Jemmeraye ended his last letter to the Governor by saying: "This, Sir, is all the information I have been able to obtain. I hope to have something more positive to communicate next year, and also to make the journey to the country of the Mandans".

Jean's letter and Christophe's were both sent on to Versailles by the Marquis de Beauharnois.

There is pleasure in knowing, the more because Christophe did not live to see another summer, that he was able later in 1735 to contrive means of getting the other 200 packages of furs sent off to Montreal.

La Verendrye and his son Louis-Joseph and the canoe-men were accompanied on the expedition by Father Aulneau, S. J., who was to replace Father Messaiger. The priest planned to spend the first winter with La Verendrye at Fort St Charles then in the summer of 1736 to go on to Lake Winnipeg



to conduct a mission among the Assiniboines who would be several months there catching white-fish. He was then to go along with the tribe in the fall on their way to the country somewhat southwest where they passed the winters. He was to settle in the first village of the Mandans that he found. The Superior-general of the Jesuits had decided after Father Messaiger returned to Montreal that it was out of the question to hope for much success in civilizing or evangelizing wandering tribes.

The missionary, Father Aulneau, was born in France on April 21, 1705. He reached Canada on August 12, 1734. That summer La Verendrye had asked the Superior of the Jesuits for someone to fill the position of chaplain of the expedition. Father Aulneau was chosen and was told to be ready to leave for the far West as soon as navigation opened. He had an unusual faculty for mastering languages, and as the French had little knowledge yet of the dialects of the Crées and Assiniboines, he was instructed to prepare a written list of their words. From this dictionary an elementary grammar would be compiled later. The priest knew the dangers of life among the uncivilized tribes. All the scholarly men of his Order were acquainted with the tragedies and martyrdoms prominent in the annals of the Church from the time the earliest missions were founded in North

America. Yet he willingly consented to proceed to points further than the most western at which any Jesuit had yet been stationed. His only regrets were over not having as companion another priest with whom to discuss spiritual affairs. Missionaries were too few to fill the stations where they were required, so Father Aulneau had to content himself with the assurance that the next Jesuit who came from France would be sent to join him in the West.

Three months canoeing and portaging over the route taken in 1731 brought the company to Fort Kaministiquia and then they were soon past the Grand Portage, up the Pigeon River and over the height of land to Fort St Pierre and on to Fort St Charles, which they reached on September 6, 1735. La Verendrye had hastened on ahead to reach the fort as quickly as possible. He had with him provisions intended for the exploration trip he planned that fall, while the other four canoes from which the posts were to be re-victualled were travelling more slowly.

The Commander of the expedition found his men at Fort St Charles on the verge of starvation and there was no wild oats harvest on which to depend, for the lake had risen and flooded the fields. The supplies he brought

were needed for immediate use there and at Fort Maurepas on Lake Winnipeg at the mouth of the Winnipeg River.

The Sieur de la Jemmeraye had been seriously ill that summer and had not been able to make his proposed exploration trip. But he was better now and La Verendrye had him proceed at once to Fort Maurepas. La Verendrye intended to wait at Fort St Charles till the other canoes with their cargoes of supplies reached him and then go on and meet his nephew.

But the four canoes did not reach the Grand Portage even till October 12, 1735, and so the little fleet had to stay till spring at the mouth of the Pigeon River, on Lake Superior, and for lack of supplies no exploration party could proceed from fort St Charles. The delay was calamitous, considering the extremities to which the men would be reduced before spring, even after using up the precious stores that were meant to stay untouched till the explorers were on their way west of Lake Winnipeg. La Verendrye's resourcefulness could not make up for the non-arrival of the canoes and as day by day went by he watched his hopes of making progress that year gradually dying. He managed before winter to find a small supply of maize and wild oats, and the natives shared with him their moose, caribou and white-fish.

Two of La Verendrye's sons and two of the French-Canadian soldiers were sent on to Fort Maurepas on Lake Winnipeg, in February (1736) for the greater comfort and safety of the Sieur de la Jemmeraye and the men with him. Till the end of his life the Commandant felt gladness that he did send these four to share the responsibilities at Fort Maurepas. For they found La Jemmeraye, the lieutenant of the expedition and next to the Commandant the one most needful for its success, had taken ill in January and was suffering greatly. The anxieties of the months when his uncle was in the East, together with his willing and faithful service from the beginning of the first expedition and the constancy with which he sought out new connections with the Indians, had helped wear down his reserve strength. His cousins saw he was far from being his old debonair self and did all that lay in their power to spare him from exertion throughout the rest of the winter. For restoration he trusted to the coming of pleasant summer days and the new explorations they were to bring.

In the spring (1736) along with his cousins La Jemmeraye went from Fort Maurepas to the post at Fourche aux Roseaux a few miles from the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. While there in the wilds he loved so well his strength diminished and he died on May 10, 1736.

For the La Verendrye brothers it was a sad reflection that their cousin who had worked with might and main for five years in the interests of the enterprise should pass to his long rest without seeing the project reach even a hope of completion. Brave, unselfish Christophe Dufrost de la Jemmeraye, who always willingly plunged forward into unknown areas or re-traversed areas already explored according to the most imperative requirements of the hour,—there was nothing the others would not have done if they could have given him back his life. As for the enterprise, Jean and his brother knew their cousin's death was the most serious blow it could sustain except only the death of its Commander.

La Jemmeraye had possessed a knowledge of many Indian dialects and a friendliness and boldness that won the Red chiefs and their followers time and again over to the side of the French. It was La Jemmeraye who drew the maps of the routes travelled and contemplated. Several of those he made are still in existence. They have been found more accurate and reliable in the form in which he signed them than with alterations added afterwards, by others, and more reliable than many maps left by later explorers of the West.

Jean and his brother wrapped La Jemmeraye in his hunter's robe and laid him in a grave under white oak trees beside the lonely river,

then marked the place with a wooden cross. There lay all that was mortal of the intrepid young explorer, the son of Marie Reine de Varennes, La Verendrye's favorite among his sisters. La Jemmeraye's great distinction was born of the splendor of his services towards the flaming adventure that resulted in La Verendrye's conquering half a continent in the face of desperate odds. La Jemmeraye was a worthy brother of Madame d'Youville, distinguished in her own right as the foundress of the Order of Sisters of Charity. There he lay, six hundred miles within the borders of the savage half-continent he helped reclaim, through his invaluable knowledge of the western tribes.

La Jemmeraye's very remoteness from his home and acquaintances and even from the main body of adventurers with his expedition gives him pride of place in one's thoughts. He had suitable sepulture, wild and primitive though it was, for his personality cannot be separated from thoughts of adventurous deeds in lonely places. The memory of a great joie de vivre and unsurpassed devotion to the undertaking with which he was associated was the bequest to Canada from this glorious young sieur, the first white man to give his life in helping discover what the centuries had kept in concealment in the all but illimitable North-West.

Word of the death of La Jemmeraye could not be taken by his cousins to their father till the ice went out of the rivers. Then Jean and his brother with seven canoe-loads, (one of the canoes containing the possessions of their cousin), made all the haste they could to Fort St Charles, abandoning Fort Maurepas for the time. When still 50 miles from Fort St Charles Jean commanded that four of the canoe-loads be cached at the Savanne portage, with two men left to guard them, while the rest hastened to the fort with all the speed the lightening of the loads made possible.

Jean and his brother, the two French-Canadian soldiers and the canoe-men reached Fort St Charles June 2, (1736).

The tidings of the death of the Sieur de la Jemmeraye stirred La Verendrye's emotions more deeply than any experience he had ever known. But he did not allow his reason to be overcome by the grievous occurrence. As always when outside forces failed him, the Explorer braced himself still more firmly to bear added burdens. In this instance he had no opportunity for indulgence in grief if disaster was not to overtake all the members of the expedition.

The double misfortune of the autumn before, the loss of the wild grain harvest by floods of water and the delay of the canoe-loads of supplies at the Grand Portage, was

being felt now in all seriousness. Every source of food was failing the Explorer. Yet his men must be kept alive. The goods from the east had not arrived. The Indians would soon be bringing furs and no trading with them could be done if there was no merchandise to offer them.

La Verendrye was not the man to say fail as long as there was a single chance of life ; and now that La Jemmeraye's life had been given in the great adventure for that reason if for none other there must be no weakening of purpose or it would seem as though the others did not fully value the sacrifice he had made for it.

In the face of the seriousness of their situation La Verendrye called his men together for a general council on the afternoon of the day he got the word of his lieutenant's death. His own willingness to take further risks for the sake of his project did not make him oblivious to the fact that if the others were to continue sharing such risks it should be only with their own consent.

It must have been a source of considerable satisfaction to La Verendrye, who had none too many heartening experiences on his second expedition, that every man present concurred in the decision to stay with the expedition.



Jean-Baptiste was appointed first lieutenant of the expedition in succession to his cousin.

The entire assembly deliberated upon how food was to be obtained as well as gunpowder and other trading-stores. The voyageur Bourassa with five comrades was despatched at once to bring relief. They were to leave in the canoe that belonged to Father Aulneau and hasten to Kaministiquia (on Lake Superior) in the hope of meeting the canoes from Montreal that should have reached Fort St Charles the autumn before soon after La Verendrye himself. The six men could greatly hasten the coming of the convoy if they had the good fortune to find it. It was agreed that the next move should be to send three more canoes with as many men as possible to Kaministiquia, following Bourassa and his single canoe-load of companions. They would spare some of the men for the canoes coming back at once and the three canoes would proceed to Michillimakinac for still more supplies (those that were due to come from Montreal that spring). Each of the three canoes was to take eastward only half a load of furs for the sake of making better time. They would return to Fort St Charles (from Michillimakinac) as fast as winds and waves

permitted, that all might be in readiness for La Verendrye to proceed with further explorations before the summer ended.

At every critical point in his life La Verendrye proved himself a man of courage and vigorous action. On this particular day, June 2, 1736, his splendid qualities must have been evident in marked degree to the men of his exploration company. There could have been no wavering whatever, not the faintest hint of indecision, on his part or his men would not have been of one mind about pursuing their quest in the face of threatened starvation.

Nearly two hundred years after that day's deliberations the bravery of the little company stands out wonderfully clear. Few incidents in history make a stronger appeal to the imagination than is made by the memory of this group of explorers, saddened by the death of the officer next to the Commandant, and gaunt and lean from many days of insufficient food, yet to a man voting in favor of keeping their fortunes pinned to the western part of the continent and of going deeper into the Unknown before the summer ended. There was nothing studied or spectacular about the scene in the rough fort. Bereavement and danger left no place in the men's minds for thoughts of what would be the popular opinion of their decision. This was not a conclave for

the consideration of winning fame and glory. In naturalness and sincerity the French-Canadian adventurers acted the part of heroes, staking everything on the chance of the canoes coming and the golden enterprise still being saved. Youth has not had offered to it for the enkindling of high spirit many parallels to their courageous action voluntarily decided upon and performed.

Father Aulneau's intentions to go to Fort Maurepas for a summer mission on Lake Winnipeg were altered by the death of La Jemmeraye and the fact of the others returning from there till supplies could be obtained. He asked now that he might be allowed to go in one of the canoes to Fort Michillimakinac to consult with the Roman Catholic priests there and to remain with them, if they thought it well, till the next spring.

It was at the request of Father Aulneau that Jean-Baptiste was placed in command of the three transport canoes. The first sergeant and not the lieutenant would have been sent had the priest not urged otherwise. Jean had just completed the hard journey from Lake Winnipeg, following a winter's care and fatigue with anxieties that culminated in the

death of his cousin and the necessity for him to inter the body and take word of these heavy things to his father.

But the priest was insistent. He said the trip would be accomplished more speedily if the first lieutenant were in command than would be the case with another directing the men. He, too, would have more authority in dealing with Indians who might be encountered on the way, and in deciding questions in any emergency. The priest won his point the more easily because of some canoes of Crees arriving and reporting that Sioux had been seen on the lake and that their avowed purpose was to get scalps. This changed the complexion of things. Consideration for all his men alike was shown by La Verendrye. His sons had never asked nor were they given safer and easier billets than the others. It was not the Verendryean way to try to evade responsibility or danger. Jean volunteered to take charge, and Father Aulneau's desire was granted.

Nineteen of the most stalwart of the French-Canadians were chosen to go with Jean and the priest. La Verendrye himself inspected the guns of the men and distributed powder and shot. With the warning of the Crees deeply cut into his own consciousness he impressed upon the men who were starting off



that vigilance against a surprise attack from Sioux warriors must be maintained. They gave him assurances that they would be watchfulness itself and that they would keep their weapons at hand every hour till they were back inside the fort.

The good-byes were said at Fort St Charles on the afternoon of June 5 (1736) and the twenty-one paddled off over a calm clear lake with last promises to the Commandant that they would make good time and soon rejoin him.

Three days from then would be celebrated the fifth anniversary of the day on which La Verendrye's first expedition left Montreal.

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## CHAPTER XIV

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### THE TRAGEDY ON MASSACRE ISLAND

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The effect of supreme and irrevocable misfortune is to elevate those souls which it does not deprive of all virtue.

—GUIZOT.

THE day after seeing the canoeists off to bring relief supplies from Lake Superior La Verendrye had forebodings of disaster. He thought the two Frenchmen left with the four canoe-loads of furs at Portage de la Savanne might have come to grief, and he sent Pierre and five other men to bring them the fifty miles to the fort asking that the things which had belonged to Christophe be guarded most carefully.

The cache was reached and the boats returned without mishap.

On June 14 (1736) La Verendrye received through a runner a letter from Bourassa written at Fort St Pierre and bearing the date of June 6. The contents of the letter would have caused consternation even had the twenty-

one members of the expedition not been on the road. As it was the hearts of all at the post were filled with fear.

Bourassa told of being surrounded one morning, on the banks of the Rainy River where he had camped for the night, by a band of about 130 Sioux warriors. The voyageur used a conciliatory tone and talked to the Sioux of the advantage it was to the natives to have the French traders come into their country. But the savages were in no mood to let their thirst for blood be appeased by words. They replied that it was not their custom to recognize anyone as a friend when they were on the war-path. There was more parleying and then Bourassa was tied to a stake to be burned, his goods having first been taken from him. But a Sioux squaw slave who was serving Bourassa pleaded his cause for he had treated her kindly, and she reasoned with the Sioux warrior chief so effectively that Bourassa's life was spared.

While Bourassa was still in a wholly frightened state the warriors questioned the woman formerly of their own nation about Crees they believed to be near Fort St Charles. She gave them the information that five or six Cree lodges were near the trading-post, 'by the tent-curtains of the French' she put it. The barbarians told Bourassa they meant to make an attack on the Crees. They did try

to carry out this plan but La Verendrye's vigilance at the fort prevented their approach.

Another record has it that the Sioux squaw slave won Bourassa's safety from being burned alive by telling his captors they would find twenty Frenchmen or more on the way to Rainy Lake if they went forward some distance and that one of them was the son of the white chief. If this was true Bourassa shielded the woman. He did not speak of it in his letter to La Verendrye.

The official report about this occurrence that was sent to France by the Marquis de Beauharnois at the end of the summer was as follows : " At the beginning of last June a band of Prairie Sioux numbering about 130 men met Father Aulneau's canoe with a man named Bourassa in charge. They seized all the Frenchmen and tied the leader to a stake to burn him alive. Fortunately a female slave of this nation that he had accepted from the Monsonis spoke to his captors saying, " My kinsmen, what would you do ? I owe my life to this Frenchman. He has never done me any but good turns ". Bourassa says himself that he was accompanied by five men and that they were surprised by thirty canoes as they were pushing off from shore in the morning. After unbinding Bourassa they told him to wait till they came back and they would restore to him his property and weapons. Of



course, they were no sooner gone than Bourassa made off at top speed for Fort St Pierre”.

Bourassa and his companions were alive and the Sioux had not harmed the allies of the French, the Cree squatters near the fort. The dread import of Bourassa's letter lay in the thought of what may have happened supposing these 130 “tigers of the north” had surprised the men who were voyaging under the direction of Jean-Baptiste.

For La Verendrye and his associates at Fort St Charles three days of dread anxiety went by and then two canoes loaded with merchandise came to the fort. The Sieur le Gros was in charge of them. He had reached Kaministiquia the autumn before, but not till freeze-up and it was impossible for him to reach the forts further west.

La Verendrye's first question was of the safety of his son and the missionary and Frenchmen.

Sieur le Gros had not met them on the road.

It was scarcely possible that the west-bound canoes could have missed the others if they were on the road. La Verendrye's long experience of happenings in the wilds led to knowledge all but clairvoyant. His sudden conclusions that a tragedy had taken place were all too accurate.

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The Sieur le Gros was despatched eastward again by La Verendrye after but a day's rest. He was to be escorted by a canoe with a crew of eight others, all under the command of the sergeant of the expedition. They left with instructions to try to follow the course Jean and his canoes were likely to have taken. Le Gros was given a letter from La Verendrye to the Governor telling of his fears that a tragedy had taken place, and relating the information received three days before from Bourassa's missive. This was the letter from the contents of which the Governor compiled the official report, mentioned already, for the Court at Versailles.

The next day a number of Crees who brought furs to the fort volunteered to paddle eastward and help in the search for the three French-Canadian canoes. But the wind from the east was stiff and the Crees did not get far.

Three days from the time the sergeant, with Le Gros and their little company started out they returned. This was on June 22. Their news confirmed the most dreadful of La Verendrye's apprehensions.

Jean, the priest, and the nineteen voyageurs had been massacred on an islet just fifteen miles from the fort, where they had said good-bye to La Verendrye, or four hours distant from it by canoe.

La Verendrye's statement was that the massacre took place "on a small island seven leagues from the fort and there most of the bodies were found, with the heads severed from the trunks, in a row close to each other which makes me think that they were killed while holding a council (with the Indians) ; their heads were wrapped in beaver-skins".

Governor Beauharnois in a letter dated from Quebec on October 14, 1737, and addressed to the Minister of the Navy, the Sieur de Maurepas, at Versailles, quotes La Verendrye's account of the massacre. Though the Commandant of the expedition did not witness the actual committing of the ruthless act, he is the one whose narrative may be accepted as approaching nearest to the facts. It was he who would weigh with most care all the possibilities, and reconstruct with most precision the dreadful scenes preceding the death of his son and his score of companions.

So far as La Verendrye could tell from the shreds of evidence gathered from whatever traces on the islet bore mute testimony, from what friendly Indians told him of the ways of the Sioux, and from statements indirectly received long after through connections of the men who carried out the massacre, what took place was this :

After paddling four hours or so the twenty-one men in the three canoes who had

left Fort St Charles late in the afternoon selected a little island where they camped for the night, making plans the while for being up and off soon after dawn, their thoughts upon the need for extreme haste in getting food supplies to La Verendrye and the others at the fort, and upon the instructions given them about unceasing vigilance against a surprise attack from Sioux.

Whether it was at nightfall or at daybreak the barbarians discovered signs of the presence of the Palefaces on the island is unknown. If they had received definite information from the squaw servant of Bourassa about the French being on the road the Sioux had a world of advantage over the French-Canadians. Even without this knowledge, in their cruelty they had a finesse in the art of cunning approach, a legacy from countless generations. The Crees made the assertion that the Sioux crawled like snakes when they chose to march unseen. So even without the help of evening shadows or morning mists, and even despite an unwinking guard on the part of the white men, it was possible for the Sioux attack to be made with scarcely more warning than that with which an adder stings.

It would not be without parallel in the annals of their tribe if these fiendish Sioux descended upon their victims in peaceful guise, making pretense of holding a council and

smoking the calumet, and then, at some pre-arranged signal among themselves treacherously wiping out the white men, even while seeming to discuss terms of alliance.

From letters of Father Aulneau it is known that he at least was acquainted with the Sioux language and the Cree. It may be that he interpreted for Jean and the men. When La Verendrye writes that the massacre took place "by the greatest of all treasons" doubtless it was counterfeit overtures of peace he had in mind.

Though none of the white men remained alive to tell of what took place there is reason to believe that the French-Canadians gallantly defended each other, and fought so well that the Sioux had their losses too, for on June 18, (just a day or two before La Verendrye's sergeant with the Sieur le Gros and the other seven French-Canadians found the island), two Monsonis found twenty blood-stained Sioux canoes and two of the larger French canoes at the Baie des Marais, and buried in the sand there were human limbs. The Indians had taken time to bury their own dead before leaving the island. The third French canoe was found later on the shore at the place of massacre.

Father de Gonnor was of the opinion, according to a letter he wrote after hearing

about the tragedy, that the twenty-one were surprised in their sleep, that all were beheaded, but not tortured.

The men who discovered the bodies of these who met death on Massacre Island stated that the heads were placed on beaver-skins, (in solemn mockery of the white men's love of furs). Most of them were scalped. Lieutenant Jean-Baptiste de La Verendrye lay on his bosom, his back cut open in many places with knife slashes and a hoe was stuck in his loins. His headless body was barbarically adorned with strips of porcupine-skin, according to letters in the Aulneau Collection.

The missionary's body was in such a position that it was thought he was beheaded while on his kness, perhaps pronouncing absolution for his confreres in dying.

In August 1908 the members of an expedition organized by Jesuit Fathers to recover the remains of Father Aulneau, Jean-Baptiste de la Verendrye and their nineteen companions made explorations at the ancient Fort St Charles and found nineteen skulls and the bones of thirteen skeletons. The bones of Jean and the priest were found but not their skulls. It was the conclusion of the searchers that the Sioux had carried off as war-trophies the skulls of these two and the scalps of the other nineteen who were beheaded. They believed, too, that the bones of the eight whose

skeletons were missing must have been scattered about after their bodies were hacked to pieces.

The successful search for the remains of the Massacre Island victims buried at Fort St Charles as soon after the tragedy as it could be done without endangering more lives is described by Judge L. A. Prudhomme in the 1916 Bulletin of the Historical Society of St. Boniface :

For 172 years the remains of that valiant band buried in September 1736 under the chapel of Fort St Charles awaited the coming of friendly hands to be gathered and given a more worthy burial-place. It is quite probable that Father Coquart and La Morenie when they visited that place said mass over their remains : but for more than 160 years their forsaken corpses were left in that deserted land, and no one seemed to remember their existence. Not a tear was shed nor a prayer breathed to refresh like a beneficent dew their precious bones.

“According as generation after generation of Indians passed away, the mysterious shadow which shrouded the site of the fort deepened and a deathlike silence brooded heavily over the little hidden bay at the mouth of the river. None but pagan Saulteaux and beasts of the forest, and those but by chance, ever came to

tread on the soil bathed with the blood of an apostle of Christ and of a handful of heroic explorers, sons of France.

“God who kept watch over the illustrious dead inspired Monsignor Langevin, Archbishop of St Boniface, with the desire to find their remains, at whatever cost of time or money. Joining His Grace and offering their services to aid his efforts came the Sons of Loyola, Oblate Fathers, some secular clergy and some of the laity. A historical society began studying the case so as to guide the searchers.

“Then, as though at the time appointed, Providence sent two Saulteaux chiefs, both aged men whose secrets would soon have been buried with them, who were the last keepers of the Indian tradition, to show the spot upon which the French had first landed on that beach. Their recollection of the exact location of the fort with its two rows of stakes was rather hazy and just about fading away altogether. They at first led the searching party to the north shore nearly opposite the true location of the fort. They also knew that in the narrow cove where the fort was discovered the French had erected some kind of building. ‘Our grandfathers have often told us that the men with the big canoes (the French) and the man of prayer had lived in the neighborhood’, said these Indian chiefs.



“Fruitless search was made the first year along the north shore. But the maps sent from Paris all showed the fort on the south shore of the lake. In August, 1908, new searches along the southern shore were crowned with success. Fort St Charles was identified, measured and recognized in every way. The location of the building for the men, the house of the Commandant, that of the missionary, the chapel and the cemetery are now known to us.

“A plan of the fort has since been drawn, a number of articles have been collected, and last of all, triumphant and consoling relics, the remains of the saintly Aulneau, the valiant Jean-Baptiste de la Verendrye, and those of their companions have been taken to St Boniface, where they will be preserved henceforth and surrounded by our respect and affection.”

Light was thrown on the events leading up to the massacre by information given to La Verendrye some time afterwards. Indians who were kindly disposed to the French and who deeply resented the treacherous act learned that several months earlier a party of Sioux came north on friendly business purposes to visit Fort St Charles. But in the woods they were attacked by Chippewayans. When the Sioux asked who it was in the shadows of trees firing upon them the answer was given, “The

French". It was accepted, and the Sioux, out-numbered at the time, retreated, vowing to take revenge upon the French. Heavily did La Verendrye and the expedition pay for the deception practised by the Chippewayans and their gruesome piece of humor..

It was on June 22 (1736) that the Commandant and the others at the fort received news of what had taken place. The first thing that La Verendrye decided must be done was to look after the living by fortifying the trading-post more strongly. The Sioux might try to annihilate the whites now that their brutality was inflamed by the happenings they had brought about on the island. Before the end of June the fort was made so secure that La Verendrye declared four men might hold it against a hundred.

On July 9, four French canoes arrived from Kaministiquia. But they carried - no cargoes. They had been filled with merchandise for trading, but they contained no food, and the canoe-men for lack of victuals were obliged to lighten their canoes 200 miles before the end of their journey that they might travel the more rapidly. They hid the supplies carefully and in about a month La Verendrye was able to spare one of his sons to make the trip for the merchandise.

The bitterness of the summer's experience was extreme but he who had endured losses

and disappointments so often once more nerved himself against giving way to lamentation and set aside thoughts of his personal interests. The sincerity of his desires for his country to win the broad western plains and to possess a road across the New World to the Orient was plain in the fortitude with which he bore his burdens through all that heart-breaking year.

Difficulties were still accumulating. They were caused now through the very regard in which the French were held by the Crees, Assiniboines and Monsonis. Their barbaric code of ethics left no alternative but to pursue the aggressors in the shedding of blood till the spirits of the victims were given repose through death by violence of members of the hostile camp. Band after band came to the fort to consult with La Verendrye about taking revenge. The Assiniboines were mortal foes of the Sioux and they were insistent in beseeching to be allowed to avenge the butchery of Jean-Baptiste. The Commandant was forced to be emphatic about their not executing this design, for a war with the Sioux would ruin his schemes and expose to torture and death all the French in western forts. In the simplest and most forceful way La Verendrye tried to reason with the Indians till they would take a different attitude. His years in the West, his nephew's and his sons' years would all count for nothing, it seemed to him, if through an

embroiling of the Red tribes now his progress through the West was stopped, and it needed no great stretch of imagination to see the forts now open having to be closed and forsaken once a general conflagration of passion seethed through the North-West. Summoning to his aid all his wealth of French politeness and genuine friendly warmth for the men of the tribes who were making his explorations possible, the white chief let his copper-colored sympathizers know it was a consolation to him that they wished to share his grief and he told them he greatly valued their regard for the memory of Jean but that if they made war it would displease him unspeakably.

At first four messengers were sent to the Commandant offering the promise of the tribes that they would come in the autumn to form a war-party against the Sioux if La Verendrye would be their leader. Thus, they said, fitting retaliation would be made for the act of treachery, the killing of Jean, (whom they had adopted as a chief at the time he was building Fort Maurepas with the Sieur de la Jemmeraye in their country), and the companions of their young white chief. Then early in August when the Indians were near the fort harvesting wild oats they spoke in exaggerated terms of their unbounded sorrow for the death of the twenty-one Frenchmen, and La Verendrye had to impress it once more on their minds that

the only friendly part they could play would be to continue at peaceful pursuits. Over and above that, he explained that his entire schemes for their future and his own depended altogether upon their warfare ending, and he implored them to help prepare against what in the winter to come. To add weight to his pleadings that they let their hatchets and their bows lie idle he informed them that it was necessary to get word to the Governor and hear his advice before any action was taken.

But the restlessness of the Indians became more and more pronounced. They declared the Sioux would hold the French in contempt if they accepted such an injury without taking revenge, and on August 26 (1736) a dozen Crees and Assiniboines came to La Verendrye and announced that their tribes had met at Fort Maurepas preparatory to making war on the Prairie Sioux (the Dakotas). The warriors would make for Point du Bois shortly, a rendezvous about 125 miles from Fort St Charles. Their visit to La Verendrye was to ask him or one of his sons to take command, and to ask him to provide them with a canoe-ful of powder, shot and tobacco.

It felt as though the tension had reached the breaking-point. The Indians were adamant in their determination to make the happening on the little island an excuse for themselves going scalp-hunting. Could La

Verendrye have foreseen that it would take missionaries, traders and colonists one hundred years working together to modify the tomahawking propensities of the western Red tribes he might have spoken less authoritatively. As it was, he did not recede from the position he had taken. He met obstinacy with immovable obstinacy, and holding a grand council he convinced them at last that it would be suicidal for them to start an insurrection just then when he had no powder nor shot to give them. They finally agreed that to look after a crop of wild oats and to expend their prowess on hunting for a time would be their best plan.

To the delight of the Indians La Verendrye sanctioned an arrangement by which fifty of their men would accompany the French to Fort Michillimakinac each spring and fall in future when they went for supplies. In this way there would be less danger of the French canoe-men being entrapped by tribes that wished them ill than if a dozen or a score of white men travelled alone. Gifts of powder, shot and tobacco were to be given each time to the Indian canoeists who made up the body-guard. These precautions met with favor all around the assembly and the Commandant of the expedition ventured to hope that the desires about going on the war-path would be forgotten.



Before the middle of September, the Crees and Assiniboines again sent a deputation to Fort St Charles, this time to ask La Verendrye to pay them a visit at Lake Winnipeg. Always remembering that everything depended on having these volatile people of the wilderness on good terms with the French, and with his characteristic willingness to meet the wishes of those around him if no foolhardy proceedings were entailed, the Explorer allowed his son, Pierre Gaultier, accompanied by half a dozen voyageurs, to proceed to Fort Maurepas in his place.

Written instructions were given to Pierre for it was imperative that no mis-step be made. The fate of the expedition had been almost sealed that summer, the expedition that La Verendrye could not bring himself to relinquish so completely was he enthralled by the splendor and mystery of the West.

The first and most emphatic of the instructions for Pierre Gaultier to carry out was to maintain a conciliatory attitude towards the tribes and to use all means in his power to keep them contented and peaceful. He was asked to tell them that La Verendrye would come himself "at the time of the great moon" (the January moon). The lieutenant of the expedition was to take with him presents,—clothing, tobacco, necklaces, a French flag. La

Verendrye promised Pierre other help would be sent to him when the canoes came from Montreal.

As soon as reinforcements could be sent to Fort Maurepas, Pierre was to take six Frenchmen and forty or fifty Assiniboines on a trip to the country of the Mandans who were 375 miles distant if the accounts brought to the French could be believed. For ten years they had been hearing of the Mandans as white men who lived in forts and houses and cultivated their fields. The Mandans lived in the general direction of the western Sea and perhaps knew the road to it. It meant something to be at last talking definitely of some of their number making the acquaintance of this superior nation.

Now finally came a pause in the summer's dangers and La Verendrye had time to think of his dead. He had the sergeant and six men go to the little island, which was to be marked in history as tragically important, to bring from that place the bodies of his son, the missionary, and the others. The bodies had been temporarily buried on an elevation on the island and they were now removed to Fort St Charles where the saddening ceremony of re-interment took place. The bodies of Jean and the priest were buried together in a box that served as casket. The nineteen skulls and all the limbs and skeletons that could be found were buried



near the first two bodies beneath the chapel within the enclosure. There they lay till the ruined Fort St-Charles was re-discovered in 1908, as has been narrated already, by the members of an expedition formed for that purpose by the Fathers of the Society of Jesus, when they were taken to St Boniface where they now rest.

The massacre and the disturbances among the Indians, their plotting and interminable quarrelling detracted greatly from the season's commerce in beaver-skins. La Verendrye's rivals, easterners who were envious of his having been given the concession, watched diligently, it would appear, for opportunities to criticise his appointment to this post in the service of the French Government. Their vigilance in searching for signs of blundering or failure, or for however slight a foundation on which to base accusations against him, equalled his vigilance against committing acts of indiscretion that might retard the accomplishing of his purpose. Neither Honor's self nor Valor's could have escaped tarnish from the insinuations that were whispered carefully where they would be sure to reach the ears of the Governor, the minister in charge of Canadian affairs, or the King. In the absence of any foundation on which to base charges of wrong-doing or negligence, it was simple to suppress details that would have

explained what was accountable for the fur-trading and the exploration going with heart-breaking slowness,—that fatal piece of lying humor by the Chippewayan warrior, the illness and death of the Sieur de la Jemmeraye, the delay of the winter's provisions through a guide's mismanagement, the endless drain on the Explorer's slender resources for presents to the savages, the lack of men from the time Jean's three canoes left the fort in June. That La Verendrye surmounted difficulties of a hundred kinds was not a matter for which the jealous gave him credit. His partners, (not his associates in the West who knew how courageously he was administering the affairs of the expedition, but the merchants to whom he had mortgaged his forts and trading privilege), were scarcely more inclined to do him justice than the political intriguers, for their interest in the concessionaire's success was largely mercenary. However rich a store of beaver-skins his canoes took down the lakes and rivers towards the Atlantic every spring they were inclined to question why still more furs could not have been secured from those endless miles of wilderness.

On October 15, 1736, came Cree and Assiniboine canoes, nine in all, to Fort St Charles. Among the visitors were La Colle and La Mikouenne, notables among the tribes. La Verendrye had all the chiefs meet in council

with him in his own house. They announced that 800 of their tribesmen were at Point du Bois waiting to start on the war-path. They, came, they said, to request La Verendrye to lead them on this attack which was undertaken to avenge the massacre of the French. They had notified him several times already about their sorrow for the death of Jean and the others and their wish to wreak vengeance on the Sioux, they reminded him, and added that this time they wanted no refusal. If La Verendrye was unable to walk they would carry him. They also asked as a favor that they might have Pierre Gaultier for a chief to take the place of his brother Jean. Their final request was that one of the La Verendrye brothers might spend the winter at Fort Maurepas.

La Verendrye was never inclined to let himself be drawn into hasty action and he told the chiefs he could give them no answer till the next day. When he resumed council with them the following morning he explained that the French never entered upon a war except at the command of their father, the King. As he could not get instructions instantly from France, nor even from Quebec, he could not make war on the Sioux just then. Besides, he said, there were French among the Sioux and French blood could not be avenged by shedding more French blood. He once more told them

what satisfaction it gave him to know they sympathized with him in the death of his men and especially his son who had loved his Indian friends dearly. La Verendrye promised to go to Fort Maurepas himself in the winter and to give the Indians word then "about what our Father wants done".

Through La Colle the chiefs of the nations represented there gave their answer to La Verendrye. They reminded him that the French had persuaded them not to take their furs to the English in the north and that for two years the French had found them supplies of guns, powder, shot, kettles and other articles. If through the default of the traders the French no longer had these for the Indians, it was natural for them to take their furs again to the Hudson's Bay. But they preferred to deal with the French, and they wished La Verendrye to go to Montreal to speak for them there and represent their needs. They asked, too, that La Verendrye take La Mikouenne's brother with him to Montreal. They promised to help his sons guard the forts while he would be gone. In the spring they would all make war on the Sioux. For the present nothing could prevent the warriors assembling at the Bois Fort and for their actions no promises could be made.

But it was October 24 when the last council was held and the lateness of the season befriended La Verendrye's purposes.

The unreliable temperament of the Indians caused constant anxiety to the Explorer. Inflammable as tinder, they might agree solemnly to treaty clauses and then ignore them with bland and innocent countenances. Along with this constant source of worryment there was the increasing difficulty of keeping a just balance between fur-trading and exploration. Since La Verendrye had mortgaged his fur-trading concession his partners had the final word with regard to the business at the posts. La Verendrye was commander of the expedition and was responsible for the safety of the forts, and it was he who called councils and ordered the placing of sentinels. But the fur-trading was less absolutely under his direction, and the clerks of the company probably thought to gain preferment by holding back the exploring activities and promoting the fur-trading. Nation-expansion suffered through this condition of things.

As an instance of the power the lesser officials had to make La Verendrye's ardent spirit chafe this incident may be cited : When the Indians left, La Verendrye wished two or three canoes sent to Fort Maurepas as he had promised his son would be done, but the company representatives would not agree to this, and even asked that the men at Fort Maurepas be brought back.

Again, when La Verendrye pointed out the need for sending to the Portage de la Savanne for the furs cached there the preceding spring the clerks preferred to send no one till the lake froze over. When they visited the cache at last it was discovered that twenty-six of the bundles had been stolen recently by the Indians and sold to the English at Hudson's Bay. This occurrence itself could be given a construction (by omitting to mention through whose instructions the furs were left at the cache so long) that would reflect against La Verendrye when as a matter of fact his advice had been to guard against such possible loss.

Six canoes with twenty-nine men came from Michillimakinac in October but brought no cargoes. The canoe-men said they had left the goods at Vermilion River, a point at which Bourassa and Eustache and twelve others intended to stay for the winter. Their operations at that place would have a detrimental effect on the amount of trading done at Fort St Pierre and La Verendrye paid forty beaver-skins to a savage to take them the Governor's orders forbidding them to winter there and insisting on their leaving the Vermilion River and going to Fort St Pierre. These instructions may not have reached them in time to be carried out. At all events the fourteen men were still at the place of their own selection the last week of the year



and on December 27 (1736) La Verendrye sent a letter by the *Sieur Douere*, one of the clerks of the company, commanding that they build a small fort around their two houses for protection against an attack from the Sioux. He stated they were to send their furs to Fort St Pierre in the spring and also to repair that fort where several stakes had been burned.

Much to La Verendrye's peace of mind news came on January 2, 1737, that the famous war-party at Fort du Bois was broken up, though more than 2,000 lodges of warriors had assembled.

On the same day, January 2, a Cree arrived from Fort Maurepas who brought word that Pierre de la Verendrye and the others at Lake Winnipeg were in good health but greatly worried at having no news of the canoes and supplies promised them for the autumn before (1736). The lack of canoes had prevented Pierre from making his intended trip to the Nation of the Mandans in the fall.

Two weeks later one of La Colle's men who was passing Fort Maurepas on his way to Fort St Charles reported to La Verendrye that the Indians there were hunting buffalo to get meats and fats for the men at Fort Maurepas, some of the hunters returning laden daily.

## CHAPTER XV

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### LA VERENDRYE REACHES LAKE WINNIPEG

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Oh ! there is nothing in the world like a vivid imagination ; and few things are finer and more sacred than the longing in a man's heart to be wandering along the leaf and timber-shaded byways and the wild, open high-ways of the land that he loves, where the wind blows fresh and free through his hair, where the rain-drops that trickle down his cheeks and over his lips are stronger and sweeter than red wine, and where the song of ilka bird is a music that cheers his wayfarings and gladdens his days.

—From “**BEHOLD THE HEBRIDES !**”

By Alasdair A. MacGregor,  
(W. and R. Chambers, Ltd.).

**I**N FEBRUARY (1737) La Verendrye with two of his sons, ten other voyageurs and a following of Indians went from Fort St Charles to Fort Maurepas at the mouth of the Winnipeg River. This was the Explorer's first visit to Winnipeg Lake and here he spent a few weeks getting acquainted with the routes further west so far as he could do so from meeting chance Indian visitors.

Rarely do military files present descriptions that have the picturesque and historical



values of La Verendrye's account of his first trip to Fort Maurepas from Fort St Charles :

“ On January 31, 1737, the Cree Indian whom I had hired and kept in pay since the autumn to guide me to Fort Maurepas arrived with twenty-two men and twenty-three women. He told me he had sent a party of young men to the said fort and their women and children were intended to give notice to all of my arrival.

“ On February 1 I sent off fifteen savages and their wives to mark out the shortest way for me, clear it of obstacles and select places to camp. The others I kept to carry provisions and be of service to me.

“ On the second, two Assiniboine messengers arrived who told me the chiefs were sending their entire families to Fort Maurepas to await my arrival. I was to be escorted by sixty of their people and fifty Crees who were a day's journey away and were laden with fats and meats. After having fed the two messengers I sent them to carry six fathoms of tobacco to those men.

“ On the morning of the third, the hundred and ten men came within sight of the fort, and I at once sent off two savages to notify La Mikouenne and two other chiefs who were not far away to come to the fort. They arrived with twelve lodges.

“ On the fourth I got the Cree and Assiniboine chiefs to come to my apartments that

I might explain to them the reason for my journey. I made them presents of clothing for all and an axe, knife, powder, awls and balls apiece. I told them of my desire to see their lands and that I would take my departure in two days. I thanked them for taking the trouble to come and said they might leave on the following day to beat the road which they would find marked out ; that it was desirable for them to arrive before I did, so as to get all the people together, and that I would talk to them on their own ground ”.

Before leaving La Verendrye had a talk with the Indians who were staying behind and tried to impress it on their minds that it would mean a great deal to him if they would stay diligently at their hunting for the two months he would be absent.

By the eighth the fort was in secure shape and the sergeant and twenty men were left at that centre. In La Verendrye's little detachment were his two sons, and eight savages and their squaws. On an excessively cold morning they started out hoping to reach Fort Maurepas in eighteen days of tramping. Every day they met lodges of Indians who offered them provisions and wished La Verendrye bon voyage. His own men killed two or three moose every day. Resuming the Commander's own description :

“ ‘Two days’ journey from Fort Maurepas eighty men came to meet me with a Frenchman sent by my son to tell me all were waiting with anticipation of happy sort. On February 25, I arrived at the fort and I ordered my party to salute it by a discharge of firearms to which the fort replied. Other discharges followed on one side and the other with shouts of joy from the assemblage of people. We settled on March 4 as the date of the council, because time was required to notify two villages of Assiniboinés at the great fork of the Red River, the place to which I purpose transferring Fort Maurepas, to facilitate navigation and commerce.”

La Verendrye had not been long at Fort Maurepas before he had the Indians drawn into conversation about the lay of the land. He heard of a lake to the west called a brother of Lake Winnipeg which connected with it by a river about fifty miles long. This discovery required that one of the chiefs should make a new map for sending to the Governor of Canada.

Yet lakes were a minor matter compared with the River of the West down which the explorers were to paddle triumphantly to the Ocean. It was disconcerting to learn now that the great river to the ‘Mandans’ land did not

run west but jogged off south and finally reached, "it would appear", as the Commandant cautiously wrote, the Pacific Ocean.

At Fort Maurepas La Verendrye was told he was 375 miles distant from the Mandans. Having no responsibility about the fur-trading at the posts he thought of trying to make the trip to the Mandans before the spring thaws. But the Frenchmen were afraid to accompany him and his plans could not be carried out. His son, Pierre, had wanted to visit the Mandans the autumn before, but canoes were denied him. "Such are our disappointments", wrote La Verendrye at this time, and in the very restraint of the words one recognizes that he was consumed with desire to be proceeding with his discovery before he would be forestalled.

Partly through the need of more men for the expedition and partly because La Verendrye was constantly reaching out toward whatever could serve the enterprise there occurred to him a suggestion for making friends with the Indians in strange countries further west. It was to buy from the Crees as many as he could of the slaves they had taken from the nations towards the sunset, then to win the confidence of these slaves who would act as interpreters when the expedition reached their-nations.

The slaves would be the better off for with the Frenchmen they would be promoted to the rank of servants.

March 4 was the Council-day. "It was so cold", wrote La Verendrye, "as to make it impossible to stay out-of-doors, so I brought the chiefs and the most influential men into my apartment".

They spoke of the disaster of the summer of 1736 that spoiled his plan to transfer the fort nearer to their lodges and they asked that he would place it in the coming summer at the fork of the Red River and the Assiniboine. They promised all the help they could give and said they would form a village there. They told him too that which he would a thousand times rather not have been told,—that they were planning to go to war in the spring to avenge the death of Jean.

A Cree chief asked, "My Father, give us your son whom we have adopted in the place of his brother, to choose the place of the fort and to keep any of us from going to trade with the English ; we love him and will cherish him like one of ourselves".

La Verendrye wrote : "My son who has a great desire to make himself useful to the Colony seemed to be flattered at the idea of going with the Crees and bringing them back in the spring to Fort St Charles, so I let them have him".

To the Indians La Verendrye gave two collars for the Mandans, to pave the way still more smoothly for his visit with them, and he asked the Indians to get from the Mandans samples of their "iron of the color of the sun" and also of the "stones which shine in the dark".

La Verendrye and his men returned in March to their main fort, spending nineteen days on the way. Fort Maurepas was left empty for a while, as the clerk of the company wished. Several weeks were spent in the routine of fur-trading life, if life among forests and peoples primeval can be said to fall into routine.

The earliest travellers that came from the West in the spring, (it was on May 26), brought word that all the Crees who lived beside Lake Winnipeg had died of small-pox.

On May 27, a French canoe came from the Vermilion River bringing word that Bourassa had gone to Michillimakinac, and that Eustache was waiting for La Verendrye. La Colle sent a message by the same canoe about the death of his daughter. This was the reason he had not visited La Verendrye. He was leaving with 300 men to go against the enemy Sioux. He added that the road to Montreal was open and safe from warring tribes and La Verendrye might pass in safety.

The Commandant was not left long in fear about his son Pierre contracting small-pox from the Crees among whom he had spent the weeks since early in March, for on May 28 Pierre came back from the Lake Winnipeg neighborhood. He told of the death of Crees from the disease. He said those who escaped the malady stopped and threw into the river according to their custom all the beaver, marten and lynx furs belonging to the dead as well as their own, "so that the shore was lined with them and the portages full, all of which was a loss, as no one among the savages ventured to touch them".

In the midst of the timorous superstition of the natives it gives the Commandant joy to record that his son kept a level head. "In the ten lodges that were with my son there was not one death; this was due to the remedies he gave them and the care he took of them... They stopped like the others to help the afflicted families; only eighteen men came to join the warriors".

The remainder of May was spent by La Verendrye in arranging affairs at the fort that all might go well while he made the journey to Montreal for men to replace those who met their sad fate on Massacre Island. On June 3 (1737) he left Fort St Charles with fourteen canoes of furs on the trip to Quebec which always consumed a summer each way.

Before leaving Fort St Charles, La Verendrye asked the Indians to keep the road open and clear of the enemy, and to take care of his sons whom he was leaving among them. There were more instructions to the forgetful natives about working early and harvesting lots of wild oats for food. There would be more Frenchmen to require oats from them for he might be sending new assistants from Fort Michillimakinac, and if so, they would come before winter.

On June 3, La Verendrye caused his son Pierre to be recognized at the review of the little forces as Commandant in his absence, and he left with the season's furs in eleven French canoes and three Indian ones. En route east he repaired Fort St Pierre, and in three weeks was at Kaministiquia (Fort William). There he left orders for necessary articles to be sent to his western forts as soon as the expected canoes arrived from Montreal. These canoes La Verendrye met 150 miles east of Kaministiquia.

At Michillimakinac La Verendrye stayed for a few days and had business discussions with the Sieur de la Marque. He suggested to the latter that the trade with the savages could be best revived by La Marque himself visiting the forts. The company's clerks were



allowing the trading to grow unprosperous through not having the supplies which the Indians wanted.

A patriarchal Indian, a brother of La Micouenne's and a man of note, accompanied La Verendrye to Montreal. The journey was so agreeable to him and the Governor's reception of him so kindly that the amour-propre of the ancient North American aristocrat was wonderfully gratified, and he never thereafter ceased talking of the courtesies shown him and extolling the one who represented in Canada the Father of the French.

It was August 3 (two months from the time they left Fort St Charles) when the fourteen canoes left Fort Michillimakinac continuing the trip. The summer weeks upon the beautiful Canadian lakes and rivers must have possessed restorative powers over the spirit of the Commandant of the venture that was proceeding slowly insofar as ocean discovery was concerned. The loss of more than a third of his men was never out of his mind and no one ever needed more than he did the revivifying influences of days of swift gliding over clear waters, noon rests in wilderness recesses on the shore, nights on beds of cedar boughs "under the wide and starry sky".

## CHAPTER XVI

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### AGAIN THE LONG TRIP FOR MEN AND MONEY

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Hush! List to the whip-poor-will's soft plaintive notes,  
As up from the valley the lonely sound floats;  
Inhale the sweet breath of yon shadowy wood,  
And the wild flowers blooming in hushed solitude.  
Start not at the whispering,—'tis but the breeze,  
Low rustling 'mid maples and lonely pine trees,  
Or willows and alders that fringe the dark tide  
Where canoes of the Red men oft silently glide.

—Mrs. LEPROHON,

"A Canadian Summer Evening".

IN THE CITIES on the St Lawrence there awaited the Explorer not even sympathy such as was shown by the Crees and Assiniboines in his misfortune and bereavement. In its place were disapproval and reproaches. From the men who with profit and in safety were handling the beaver-skins for which he risked everything he had to accept criticism and to hear charges that it was his greed for profits which caused the Sioux to feel hostility to the French. This unjust treatment had the effect of salt rubbed on open wounds.

La Verendrye's rivals and detractors had not waited till he was present to defend himself

before casting slurs upon his motives and his actions and historical records show that their malicious hints had their effect. As an instance of the serious injury that was being done to La Verendrye's prospects there may be quoted a letter written on April 22, 1737, by the Marquis de Maurepas at Versailles to the Marquis de Beauharnois at Quebec : " Everything I have heard concerning the cause of that accident strengthens me in the opinion I have always held and never took the trouble to conceal from you that trading in beaver-skins was more important in the eyes of the *Sieur de la Verendrye* than the discovery of the Western Sea."

► It sounds monstrous that one in a seat of power, surrounded by elegance and luxury, with talented friends in plenty near enough to be summoned nightly, and, most to be desired of all, plenty of food within reach ere ever he was hungry, should so misconstrue the purposes of a heart that for nearly forty years had cherished one constant hope, a hope that had nothing whatever to do with fortune-building ; and should use his power in making the other's purposes more difficult of fulfilment than they need have been. But amid the intrigues and amusements of a brilliant European Court how could statesmen know that on the Lake of the Woods one of the bravest men of his century and his little exploration

company were facing starvation (at the time of the massacre) and that canoes had to be sent to bring food before the party could pursue the search for the Sea? Could they have known how many times more eager La Verendrye was to penetrate further west than they were to have him do so they would have scorned as pestilential breaths the whispers of defamation.

The man of destiny had no time for nursing smarting wounds. His country's glory was placed before life itself that summer ten years before at the forts on Lake Nipigon, and he knew of no reason why he should change his relative valuation of national and personal interests. If a hundred Frenchmen willingly faced with him the dangers lurking in the West and if they and he met death,—it would be for France and Canada. For his own part he desired nothing else but to lead a party of adventurers on westward across the broad plains to the edge of which his chain of forts now stretched. What mattered a few reproaches more or less, so long as nothing prevented his finding men and money for carrying the adventure further?

The reasons for his returning from the West without having more progress to report were presented by La Verendrye in letters he wrote to the Marquis de Maurepas in October, 1737, from Quebec. Letters he wrote to the

Colonial Minister on October 1 and 17 both state as the chief reason of the interruption in his explorations the deaths of his nephew, his son, the missionary and the party of Frenchmen, with his consequent shortage of men.

Next to the principal cause was another weighty factor,—the lack of money and supplies. He explained that the funds from the rental of the trading-posts could not cover the necessary expenditure for building and equipping so many forts and paying the wages of the explorers. He drew attention to the fact that the provisions he took west on his second expedition for purposes of exploration had been used at the forts, though the responsibility for the forts being short of food was not his own.

A third reason for his present visit to Quebec, was his having been entreated by the Indians to go down to tell the Governor of their needs and bespeak the latter's good graces on their behalf. In stating this third reason La Verendrye made it clear he was not suggesting that he was over-influenced by the savages for he added that he was more eager than the Indians that friendly feelings should exist between them and the French on account of his project.

Summarizing the situation in his frank, straightforward way, the Explorer wrote :

“ And seeing I was in want of everything, and unable to get supplies brought up quickly enough I came to the determination to go down and return with diligence. . . . I can assure you, Monseigneur, that far from making any profit in the business, I am using up a considerable portion of my own means and am heavily burdened. But that does not trouble me, owing to the hope I have of succeeding and of obtaining some consideration from His Majesty for my achievements. Wherefore, Monseigneur, I beg Your Lordship to reward me for my long services by a company, seeing that there are several vacant in this country, and with a Cross of St Louis in consideration of my wounds.”

Monsieur de Maurepas was no more favorably inclined than before towards the idea of spending money on explorations in the central depths of North America. Besides, the minister still entertained the same opinion of La Verendrye as when he had written to Quebec six months before saying he believed in the Explorer's eyes trading in beaver-skins was more consequential than the discovery of the Western Sea. La Verendrye's rivals saw to it that the minister and the courtiers continued to have that impression, for only thus could they hope to have La Verendrye's concession withdrawn and given to one of their own business connection.

But even though La Verendrye's request to be given command of an exploration company in recognition of his services was not granted he managed to find some individuals who had a touch of romance and love of country in their being and admiration for courage and daring. From these men who felt the magic of his dream he secured resources enough to make him feel he could penetrate at last new areas. He started west in the middle of June (1738) with six canoes and twenty-two men.

While La Verendrye was in Quebec, the Governor, the Marquis de Beauharnois, wrote to the Marquis de Maurepas, mentioning especially the visitor who was in Quebec with La Verendrye, the brother of La Micouenne, who had confided in him (the Governor) about the Indians' desire to have revenge for the death of the party of Frenchmen. The Governor reported to his superior in rank that his reply to the representative of their Red allies would be, "I shall find a suitable occasion for avenging the massacre and meanwhile the tribes are free to pursue the war that has always been carried on". The Governor consulted with the Minister of the Navy about the closing of Fort Beauharnois on the Upper Mississippi. The Sieur de St Pierre who had been the Commandant at that fort had been obliged to abandon it because of the increased

ferocity of the Sioux and he was in Québec at the time the Governor was writing. St Pierre spoke of the fact that one of the Sioux braves who had passed his fort sometime later than midsummer of 1736 wore in his ear a seal that had belonged to Father Aulneau, and which had been ravaged from him at the time of the massacre.

That the Marquis de Beauharnois was deeply absorbed in La Verendrye's explorations, altogether aside from the finding of an Ocean, is evident from a letter he wrote to Versailles on October 1, 1738, telling of what the administrators in Canada hoped would be gained through the intercourse he was making possible : " The connections the Sieur de la Verendrye has established with the nations of those vast territories cannot fail to procure very great advantages for the Colony, particularly if it becomes evident in the sequel that they are truly attached to the French.. Peace would be equally advantageous to his discovery and for the exploitation of the copper mines, if success in this is possible.. The Sieur de la Verendrye's son tells me the Indians are impatiently awaiting the return of his father, and that they have built a large fort at the grand forks of the Assiniboine to shelter the French."

In the course of the same letter, the Marquis had some things to tell his friends in





France about the Indians as a whole which were not at all to the credit of the original North Americans. There is no shadow of doubt, no possible doubt whatever, but that he felt commiseration for the Commandant of the expedition who required to depend largely for his success upon the support he could get from the uncivilized creatures. He referred to "the inconstancy of the savages, the slight reliance that can be placed on minds governed by intemperance and superstition", and to the absurdly trifling causes that moved the minds of the savages. His exasperation over the unpredictable things they did was expressed in these words : " Their manners are so odd and so little governed by ordinary sense that they throw away on the impulse of the moment all the advantages which they held long, and sacrifice them at the recollection of some past wrong. Remembering some ancient grudge they will wreak vengeance upon a nation with which they are believed to be closely united ; or they will do the same over some whim suggested to them in a fit of intoxication... You can judge, Monseigneur how much reliance can be placed on minds of that order."

## CHAPTER XVII

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### LA VERENDRYE'S THIRD EXPEDITION

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The many obstacles La Verendrye had to conquer served to show the fertility of his resourcefulness and the unquenchable force of his courage. By his uprightness and his gentleness of manner he won the respect and love of the Indians.

—L. A. PRUD'HOMME.

NOW COMMENCED an eventful year for the Sieur de la Verendrye, a year that marked his arrival at the peak of his share in the adventure that was his whole existence, and that marked the nearest approach to the Western Sea he in person was to make. But along with its glories and triumphs this third expedition was to have also its individual varieties of hardships, distinct from those he had known, and plenty of dark, despairing times against which his flaming qualities of mind and heart showed up brightly.

The Commandant of the gallant undertaking left Montreal and its fringing civilization on June 18 (1738) and arrived at Fort

Michillimakinac on July 20. While there he consulted with two of his partners, the Messrs. Nathan and Nolant de la Marque, and it was decided that they would follow La Verendrye to Fort St Charles as soon as they had some other business transacted and go with him on a search for the country of the Mandans.

Lake Superior may have been stormier than usual that summer or delays may have been caused through the need of repairing the canoes. To cross the lake on this third expedition took the voyageurs a month and a half. But by August 5 the tiny flock of canoes reached Kaministiquia, (Fort William),

then hastened on up the nine-mile portage, up the Pigeon River, through the labyrinthine road among the lakes and islands around the heights of land and then down the streams that brought them to Rainy Lake and Fort St Pierre. The trip by canoe from the St Lawrence to the Rainy River in itself possessed more dangers and more exciting situations than the home-keeping encounter in a lifetime, and the thrilling experiences demanded all the quickness and resourcefulness of one long used to the life of the wilderness ; yet for La Verendrye the dangers of shooting the rapids, narrow escapes from flood and tempest and perilous mischances when wrong courses were taken no more called for comment than the calmest part of his day's activities.

The Crees who were squatters at Fort St Pierre showed unmistakable symptoms of delight over seeing the Explorer again and they called him Father. To his quite fatherly questions about how peaceful the Indians had been in his absence and how they had observed his wishes the reply was given truthfully that 300 Monsonis, 250 Crees, and 800 Assiniboines had started on the war-path against the Sioux. But this formidable expeditionary force was attacked by an invisible enemy and the movement ended as a fiasco. Smallpox broke out among the warriors and laid many of them low. Through deaths, weakness and fear the embattled bowmen were demoralized and their fury wasted away into a tame willingness to creep back to their homes where perchance they might get back their vigor by gradual stages.

La Verendrye went on to Fort St Charles, reaching that centre on August 31, 1738, after having been away since the first week of June, 1737.

Since peace among the Indians was the greatest consideration now as always if the West was to be held for France, the first thing the Explorer did on his return was to make vigorous recommendations about observing care against giving cause for any outbreak of hostilities. He called together three chiefs with whom he had consulted fifteen months

before, La Colle, La Micouenne and Le Chenail. He gave them a direct and emphatic message from the Governor that there was to be no more fighting and that the Indians were to be off early to their hunting-grounds and give their entire attention to gathering furs. Only on these conditions could the French promise to keep the forts open in the West and provide the tribes with powder, shot, kettles and clothing. He reminded them that it was much to the advantage of the tribes to co-operate with the French and be able to get from them the articles on which they began to depend instead of having to make the ten days' trip down to the Hudson's Bay and the twenty days' trip home again as they would have to do if the French abandoned their western forts.

La Micouenne's venerable brother had come back with La Verendrye and his account of the grandeur and power and courtesy of the French impressed his kinsmen.

Replying to La Verendrye's pronouncement, Chief La Colle in florid terms lamented that permission for them to go out and slay the Sioux in settlement of the score of Jean's deplored death was withheld. Still, they would obey the command to mind their hunting now and would live in the hope of the command yet being reversed.

When this was settled La Verendrye granted their request that his well-liked son, Pierre Gaultier de la Verendrye, should be made a chief of the Indians near Lake Winnipeg, as he had already been made by the tribes near the Lake of the Woods soon after his brother Jean's death.

There was no longer anything to prevent La Verendrye starting on his way westwards except that the de la Marque brothers had not come along. The Commandant begrudged losing the bright autumn days and on September 11 decided to wait no longer but to go on ahead. It was a compact little fleet that ventured forth,—six canoes well-provisioned and carrying many presents in the hold of the leading vessel for the Indians whose ranges were to be crossed before the smell of brine would reward the Explorer for his years of searching for the Sea.

Pierre was left behind to be the manager of the stationary part of the expedition, while his younger brothers, François and Louis-Joseph, (the latter was the map-maker who had been in the West now for three years), accompanied their father. The aged brother of La Micouenne who had made the trip to Montreal was chosen to go with La Verendrye as interpreter. They reached Fort Maurepas on Lake Winnipeg on September 22, 1738. Here they stayed over-night at the last fort

Jean had built and the fort that was Christophe's home for the last winter of his life. Monsieur Louvière d'Amours was in command at the fort and had there with him fourteen men. Five of these men joined La Verendrye's little force for the greater safety of the expedition to the Mandan villages.<sup>7</sup> On the way south from Lake Winnipeg to the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers the company passed Fort aux Roseaux and stopped there awhile that La Verendrye and his sons might pay honor to the memory of Lieutenant the Sieur de la Jemmeraye at his resting-place beneath the grove of white oaks.

Proceeding up the Red River stroke by stroke on the glorious, golden late September days they reached the mouth of the Assiniboine on the 24th of the month and encamped there, the first white men to visit the place where Winnipeg now stands. La Verendrye himself undoubtedly was the first to put foot to earth as the men prepared to draw up the canoes. In fancy La Verendrye may have seen there the mid-Dominion metropolis of the future, but what his eyes saw clearly was a cluster of Cree cabins, ten in all. The Indians had been apprised that the Explorer was ascending the River and they awaited him at this vantage point.

While thinking of the exaltation of spirit which La Verendrye and his sons must have

felt there at the entrance to an illimitable ocean of rolling prairie, their own by right of discovery first of all civilized men, there come to mind the prophetic words written so long before by Father Charlevoix to the Minister in charge of affairs of the French Possessions in North America : " In our search for the Western Sea that may happen which has often happened in like circumstances, namely, that in searching for what we are not destined to find, we may find what we were not looking for, and what would be quite as advantageous to us as the object of our search ". La Verendrye's desires remained constant to his life-long Inamorata, the Pacific Ocean of his dreams, but he must have felt the enchantment of the less phantasmal, honey-colored prairie sea now stretching out before him !

In the records of the three expeditions with heart-rending frequency mention is made of periods when there was danger of starvation so it is pleasing to come upon a statement that here on the banks of the Assiniboine in the fall of 1738 the natives were prepared to banquet the Explorer and his companions. They invited the travellers to stay for some time. La Verendrye was ever mindful that his reaching the Western Sea and getting home again to tell of the achievement was dependent primarily upon his having the good-will of the Red tribes all the way from Montreal to the



edge of the Ocean. So he remained a couple of days at the point which later became the gateway through which hundreds of thousands of home and fortune-seekers were to pass. He could have tarried longer but that the roads were beckoning him in the beautiful autumn weather and his dream was stirring in his brain.

Two chiefs among the Indian group were taken to La Verendrye's tent. They may well have borne themselves with a proudly aristocratic air the rest of their days because of the honor they could claim. The heads of sophisticated men have been turned by lesser distinctions than being for a few hours on terms of intimacy with one the memory and tradition of whom were to become a radiant possession for countless men of other centuries.

Interpreter La Micouenne again in this instance splendidly repaid La Verendrye for having taken him on the trip to Montreal. He acted now effectively in the role of impresario for the expedition, telling all the tribesmen of the friendly reception given to him and of the wealth and the remarkable ways of the French and of the honors that should be heaped upon any of that race who came so many hundred miles to visit the savages. The Indians showed much friendliness towards the Explorer, his sons François and Louis-Joseph, and their com-  
patriots, the debonair voyageurs. La Verendrye mentioned hearing a rumor about the English

at the Bay giving a necklace and other presents to one of the Crees and trying to cajole them into causing trouble for the French, but the chiefs blandly assured him such was not the case, and that their men would trade only with the French as long as the French were within reach.

Jean and the other sons of La Verendrye had always been commissioned to make trips of exploration among the tribes neighboring the posts and many Indians knew of the Commandant through them. Those in the lodges on the Winnipeg site remembered Jean as having built the first white man's fort on the fringe of the prairie, and one of them now told La Verendrye of his having taken a band of warriors against the Sioux to punish them for Jean's death, but he had to confess the undertaking had not been an unqualified success for they had brought into subjection the men from only six cabins.

One is amused at the description given to La Verendrye by his hosts here (in childlike wish to themselves stand highest in his estimation) of the Assiniboines whom he would find further up the river : "The Indians you are going to visit do not know how to hunt the beaver, but are very worthless people who dress only in buffalo skins and have never seen a Frenchman."

La Verendrye told them he wanted to teach the Assiniboines how to hunt the beaver and that the next year he would take a different route for he wanted to see the whole country. Truly a greater task that he could suppose for one who had to depend upon but a pair of legs and a pair of paddles ! He confided to them that he intended to go on up the Assiniboine as far as possible that fall and reach the Mandans, a nation of white people reports of whom had piqued his curiosity for so many seasons.

The pot-feast ended and the Commander stepped into the foremost canoe and all resumed their voyage up the Assiniboine which that season was unusually low as the summer had been dry. The bordering of trees sheltered herds of deer and on the prairie were thousands of buffalo. Large bands of Indians were met with all along and each one joined the exploration party. Finding they could make more speed by having all the company walk except the men paddling that arrangement was carried out for six days. At the end of that time—it was now October 2—the canoe-men told La Verendrye the river was too shallow for them to go further without breaking the canoes, as the Indians at the fork of the rivers told him would happen.

They stopped that evening at a wooded spot where the Indians had a well-travelled

portage for the fourteen miles from the River Assiniboine northward across to Lake Manitoba. Questions from the Explorer brought the information that crossing northward the whole extent of Lake Manitoba the Indian traders then made their way to Lake Winnipegosis. The Explorer was to learn later that from those lakes it was possible for voyageurs to get their canoes upon the Saskatchewan, and many years afterwards adventurers who chose to go so far afield found that they could reach the Athabasca River and Great Slave Lake from Fort La Reine by heading always northward and westward. Still beyond was the Mackenzie River and the northern seas within the Arctic Circle. (The names for these rivers and lakes in the years of the dawn of civilization on the continent were altogether different from those since given to them, of course). Or, if the wanderer did not wish to go north-westward for a thousand miles up the Saskatchewan from Lake Winnipegosis he might cross to Cedar Lake (Bourbon Lake, they called it in La Verendrye's time) thence into Lake Winnipeg and upon the Nelson River to be carried down to the Hudson's Bay. Again, if from the place where La Verendrye camped that night the voyageur chose neither to retrace the road to Montreal, nor yet to go up the Saskatchewan, nor north-eastward to the Bay, he had still another lordly choice, for

when the water was high he could make an excursion of many hundred miles up the Assiniboine and its tributaries the Souris and the Qu'Appelle

The particular spot where the expedition halted, now the site of Portage La Prairie, (so called from the name of the Indian trail from the Assiniboine north to Lake Manitoba), was made to appear by the Indians like the intersecting point for the main waterways of the world. The fact that he and his score or so of men were the only civilized travellers who had ever gazed over the prairie from that river-bend did not deter La Verendrye from thinking it a magnificent strategical point for the next stepping-stone in his Giants' Causeway of trading-posts. "Here you will stop everybody", said the Indians,—"everybody" being the Red men from the south-west who took their furs over these lakes and rivers to the Bay. According to La Verendrye's calculations this point was 180 miles by canoe-ways from the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers (Winnipeg).

The day after arriving at this place (Portage La Prairie) the Commandant commenced the erection of a fort and by the middle of October it and several houses for the workmen were finished. The new fort was called La Reine in honor of the Queen of France. The route by Fort La Reine became preferred

over that by Lake Winnipeg by early traders who wanted to reach the Saskatchewan. The fort here became the base of La Verendrye's exploration to the Missouri River.

The Commandant's own narrative about how the decision was formed to erect a fort at this place is clear and concise : "I held a consultation to see what we should do. The general opinion was that the best thing to do was to stay there, for these reasons,—that we could go no further ; that we ran a great risk of injuring our canoes so badly we should not be able to get out, for the place offered neither gum nor resin for mending them ; that there were good facilities for building ; that it was the road to the English posts and we had reason to expect many people to pass that way and all of them people who do not go to Fort Maurepas. . . I determined to choose a good spot for building a fort, which was commenced at once. I was still hoping Monsieur de la Marque would come and join me. Had I gone further he could not have found me. While the men were building as diligently as they could, I spoke to the Assiniboines. I made presents to them. . . They received me with much ceremony, shedding tears of joy. . . They thanked me earnestly and promised to do wonders. . . The old man (Interpreter La Micouenne) then spoke, and certainly he left nothing unsaid that could instruct the savages,

or help them understand what it is to be connected with Frenchmen. The whole proceedings were brought to a close with many tears and thanksgivings”.

When the Explorer had been at Fort La Reine just a week the Messrs. Nathan and Nolant de la Marque and eight other Frenchmen came along in two canoes. The elder M. de la Marque, when asked by La Verendrye about the forts, stated that he had left two traders and eight hired men at Fort St Charles and that he had brought M. d'Amours and some men from Fort Maurepas to the Fork (the Red and Assiniboine Rivers) and left them there with instructions to build a fort for serving the fur-traders from up the Red River. The new post was to be named Fort Rouge, and this name still designates a section of Winnipeg City. Fort Rouge and Fort aux Roseaux never became busy fur-trading centres but the former was valuable as a stopping-place for the French travelling between Fort La Reine and Fort Maurepas.

There is reason to believe that during their years of operations at Fort La Reine (Portage La Prairie) the French built a small fort also at the junction of the Souris River and the Assiniboine.

Fort La Reine was built on the north bank of the Assiniboine River and its ruins are just at the west end of the city of Portage La

Prairie. The 190th anniversary of the commencement of the building of the Old Fort (as it is called) will be observed by the people of the city on October 3, 1928. This the first French fort on the prairie became the headquarters for the future exploration of La Verendrye and his sons.

Sergeant Sanschagrin, one of the most trustworthy and intelligent among La Verendrye's followers, was placed in command of the new Fort La Reine and was given written instructions as to his chief's wishes for its administration. Two soldiers and ten other men were left with him.

Something more is learned of the generous mind of La Verendrye from his reception of the Sieur de la Marque: "I testified my gratitude to M. La Marque for the pains he had taken to bring us re-inforcements. He had brought all the canoes there were, not that he hoped to be able to load them all (with furs) for he had not been able to bring any large amount of merchandise; but as he had promised to join me he wanted to keep his word. He knew I needed men for my exploration, and he brought some accordingly. I thanked him and observed that if he did not make any profit out of our exploration he would at least save the expenses of himself and his men till their return. He said he wanted to share the



expenses of the expedition. I said, " No, it is enough for you to furnish your services and your men's without having to bear part of the expenses for which I have made special provision ". At his request I gave him a place within the fort on which to erect a cabin for himself and his people when we should get back from our journey.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

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### MAKING FRIENDS WITH THE MANDANS

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French, English, Irish, Scotch he reconciles,  
Boasts them alike, and with his boasting smiles—  
That's me—that's Canada—a fourfold flame  
Of mighty origins surrounds the name.  
Lives there a man in all the land today.  
Can wish one pioneering race away?  
... What care we if twenty races blend  
In blood that flows Canadian at the end?

○N OCTOBER 16 (1738) at Fort La Reine La Verendrye had the drum beat to arms to pass everyone in review and select such as were necessary for his expedition to the land of the Mandans. He chose ten of M. La Marque's men and ten of his own, and the entire party when ready to leave consisted of La Verendrye and his sons, François and Louis-Joseph; the two Messieurs de la Marque; a couple of men who were formerly slaves and served La Verendrye; the twenty hired men; and 25 Indians,—fifty-two in all. The Indians included a number of women. The wife of the guide was detailed to carry a leather bag into which the Explorer packed a number of things he needed for constant use.

The two servants were asked to carry his other possessions. After the examination of arms, La Verendrye had the orders of the Governor regarding the post published ; then he gave each of the French-men a pound of powder, 20 balls, a pair of shoes, an axe, a kettle to use on the way ; and to each, whether French or Indian, tobacco, awls, gun-flints, gun-screws, shells, a bag of powder and 60 balls. All were notified to be ready to start on the journey on October 18. The Indians at Fort La Reine were encouraged to hunt buffalo diligently while La Verendrye was away that provisions might be furnished for the thirteen men left there.

Three days after the builders of Fort La Reine completed their task La Verendrye and his fifty-one associates were off on their gallant quest with freshly awakened hopes. They were going to cross the prairies on foot. Horses were unknown to the northern Indians and the canoes could not be taken since it was on the verge of winter, and besides, the Explorer hoped to reach the land of the Mandans by a route more direct than the waterways. The march was begun on October 18, 1738.

The especial glamour which characterized the days of tramping south-westward was created by the possibility that the Mandans possessed some knowledge of the fabled Sea

that was supposed to lie between America and Japan. One marvels at the resiliency of La Verendrye's spirit that was still susceptible to the lift of mystery and romance after seven sharply checkered years of exploration.

The company of Frenchmen had to depend entirely on the Indians as guides across the country and the Red rovers found the temptation to join in a bison hunt now and then in the glorious autumn weather irresistible. Other excuses, too, were found for making long detours, with the result, maddening to one who wanted to be hurrying straight to the rim of the continent, that forty-six days were spent on a journey that could have been completed in sixteen.

The Mandan villages were 300 miles from Fort La Reine and had the little force travelled as steadily as the eager Adventurer wished they would have arrived soon after the month was out. But it was necessary to have the Indians as escort for his slender column of French-Canadians. The implacable Sioux might loom up suddenly between it and the horizon and La Verendrye, his sons, partners and men be given short shrift as had Jean and those with him on the islet in the Lake of the Woods. The same years that taught La Verendrye the insensate cruelty of the Sioux had given him much practice also in the gentle art of possessing his soul in patience, and so he bent cheer-

fully enough to the exasperating delays even on days when the Indian modes of travelling proved their most circuitous and deliberate and when they failed altogether at the times their temperamental lordships chose to invite their souls.

An Assiniboine village of forty cabins was sighted the third day of the journey and here the Indian chief insisted on the travellers staying over for a buffalo feast. They were now sixty-five or seventy miles from Fort La Reine.

Some days later for the guide's "height of happiness" the entire party was taken 22 leagues out of the way to visit a second village of Assiniboines. Messengers had been sent in advance and La Verendrye was expected. Word of his presence spread so quickly that 600 Indians appeared as if by magic and had 102 teepees making a picturesque setting for his camp. The wildest joy was expressed over the coming of the white men and La Verendrye and his sons and the Sieur de la Marque and his brother were invited to the hut of a young chief where everything was ready for their reception. A great feast was made for the leaders and all their men, "who did not want for a good appetite", as the Explorer-diarist wrote. It is difficult to understand why the happiness of the natives was so intense upon seeing white men for the first time. The

emotional outburst with which the visitors were hailed may have been due to an immeasurably glad hope that some power, a friendly one, greater than the cruel Sioux had at last come among them and would be a protection.

It was on November 18 the Frenchmen and their guides and followers reached the Assiniboine village. On the next morning La Verendrye had the chiefs and principal men of the village assembled and after the ceremonies of making presents to them he talked with them about the French nation and their posts in the West where the natives might have their needs supplied. As to the savages in the Lake of the Woods country La Verendrye reasoned with his new acquaintances about being diligent in hunting beaver and looking after their land. He could scarcely have wished to impress them more profoundly than he did, for, as he wrote to the Governor later, "Then came profuse thanks and many tears; also a ceremony which consisted in each man placing his hand on my head and taking me as his father in your stead and place, and similarly our countrymen as brothers by the same placing of hands on the heads of all of them and weeping".

After the affecting scenes just described a thoroughly embarrassing manner of showing further friendliness was hit upon. The orator of the Red encampment said to the Explorer : "Our Father having taken the trouble to come

to us, we are all going to accompany you to the Mandans and then conduct you back to your fort. We sent four men to notify the Mandans and they have come back and report that the Mandans are delighted at your coming and they will travel to meet you. We have sent four other young men to conduct them to the rendezvous we have settled on. We shall go there by easy marches hunting by the way in order to have fats when we arrive there to eat with their grains, for they eat these with water always, having for the most part neither meats nor fats".

With his courtier-like ways even with savages La Verendrye could do no other than accept the company of the 600 persons who wished to be added to his entourage. He urged them only to hasten in leading him to the Mandan people, and the most dilatory among them saw the season was advanced and travelling would be unpleasant soon.

At the Assiniboine village La Verendrye bought a quantity of fats and gave his men as much as they cared to carry and had the savages paid for carrying some too. He told his men he meant to stay part of the winter and they were the more willing to carry a good weight of fats lest they should have to eat their corn and beans with nothing but water. On November 29 the whole village set out along with the fifty-two members of the expedition

to traverse the seventeen leagues to the point which was to be the rendezvous with the Mandans.

“Monsieur de la Marque”, wrote La Verendrye, “gave attention now to all that was told us about the Mandans”. The sentence is delicious in its naiveté. As there had not been a day in ten years when his own attention had not been rivetted instantly upon anyone who made reference to the Mandans or any other tribe roaming west of Lake Superior it is amusing to have him pointing to his partner’s concern as to whether or not they were on the verge of unveiling the great mystery of centuries.

“Every day they talked to us”, reported the diarist, “about the whites we were going to see, Frenchmen like ourselves. Every word they said gave us hope of making a remarkable discovery. As we went along the Sieur de la Marque and myself made plans about what we were going to say”.

Of course the hopes of the valorous Voyageur were to be thrown to the winds when he reached the Mandans and once more he had to go through the process of watching his phantom Ocean recede. Why did the Sieur de la Marque not remind him that the Assiniboines were likely as regardless of the truth as the tribes whom they knew well? Why did his



memory not prompt him about his own quondam remark that now and again by *accident* the Indians did tell the truth ?

La Verendrye and La Marque spoke of the good order of marching devised by the Assiniboines to avoid being taken by surprise by an enemy. The old and infirm were placed in the central one of the three columns and there were skirmishers in front and on the wings and a strong rear-guard. "When the skirmishers see buffalo, as often happens", La Verendrye wrote, "they give a cry that is heard by the rear guard and all the most active men in the columns join the vanguard so as to surround the beasts, numbers of which they kill. Whereupon each man takes all the meat he wants. As that arrests the march, the vanguard marks out the camping-ground and no one may go any further. The women and the dogs carry all the baggage ; the men carry only their arms. They often make the dogs carry fire-wood even,—for they sometimes have to camp in mid-prairie. The clumps of trees occur only at distant intervals. The route is through prairie country, but with hills and valleys ; there are some magnificent plains nine or ten miles in extent."

La Verendrye's company arrived at the rendezvous on November 30. The convoy from the Mandans came that night, one chief with 30 of his men and the four Assiniboine

scouts. For the Explorer it was to be a night of unspeakably great disappointment. The first glance showed him the Mandans were not French, were not civilized, were not even much different from the rest of the Indians.

From an eminence of land the Mandan chief studied the size of the party of excursionists that had come to visit him. "Assuredly our assembly looked pretty extensive", commented La Verendrye, thinking of his retinue of 600 prairie Indians.

After a time the Mandan chief was taken to La Verendrye's cabin where a place at one side was prepared for him. But he went and sat beside the Explorer and some of his people sat next. He then presented La Verendrye with some Indian corn in the ear and with a roll of native tobacco. La Verendrye seems to have been the earliest skeptic about gift-tobacco, and he was perhaps the more merciless about this offering because of the shattering that might of his air-castle. At all events he wrote : " It (Mandan tobacco) is not good, as they do not know how to prepare it as we do. It is a good deal like ours with this difference that it is not cultivated but wild, and that they cut it green, using the stalks and leaves together ! " And for once the Explorer fell into self-complacency : " I gave him some of mine which he found very good ", was the entry in the diary.

“ I confess I was greatly surprised ”, so reads the record for that evening on the Dakota prairie, “ for I had expected to see people quite different from the other savages, according to the stories that had been told us. The Mandans do not differ from the Assiniboinés.. being naked except for a garment of buffalo-skin worn carelessly without any breech-cloth. I knew then there was a large discount to be taken from all that had been told me ”.

The chief wanted La Verendrye to stay with him when they had arrived that far, and said he would show him the two collars sent to him from Fort Maurepas by La Verendrye months before.

La Verendrye thanked him and said he had come from a great distance to form a friendship with the Mandans and would talk to them as soon as he got to their main fort.

The crafty Mandan chief may have felt sincerely proud to play the generous host to the first white men to make their way as far West as his domain, but nothing was further from his intentions than to find provisions for a few days for 600 Assiniboinés. He had noted carefully the size of the encampment even before welcoming the French, and concluded that to feed the throng would be an expensive matter. Yet the custom was to make no charge for looking after the needs of visitors. It was a point of etiquette with the

Mandans to accept merchandise in return only for grain that was to be carried away. The chief conceived a way of observing all the proprieties and at the same time discouraging the Assiniboines from making a long stay.

The Assiniboines were not noted for bravery, and the Mandans knew that for them the Sioux were betes noirs. So with all the aplomb of an emperor the chief gave warmest thanks to the Assiniboines for having piloted the French to that district. They could not have come at a season more apropos, he said, for the Sioux had been made acquainted with the movements of the French and they would soon be along on the war-path. The Mandan chief begged La Verendrye and his men as well as the Assiniboines to be so good as to assist him in defeating the Sioux. His men put much dependence on the courage and valour of the French.

While the Assiniboines grew panic-stricken over the prospect of an encounter with the Sioux, La Verendrye, who no more scented a deception than did his camp-followers, felt not at all dismayed but elated instead. Here at last would be an opportunity to settle some scores with the accursed nation that had annihilated the twenty-one Frenchmen on the little island in the Lake of the Woods. It would be no battle of La Verendrye's seeking and no blame could attach to him for its taking

place, yet he would have the satisfaction of measuring his skill with that of the barbarians and punishing some members of the tribe for the outrage.

La Verendrye promised the chief that if the Sioux came while he was still there he and his Frenchmen would give all the help in their power.

The Assiniboines held a council to decide whether to go on with La Verendrye to the headquarters of the Mandans, stay at the rendezvous where they were, or leave for their homes summarily.

No advantage came to the Mandan chief from the trick he tried to play on his visitors for during the council one old brave shamed the rest of his tribesmen by saying : " Don't think our Father is a coward ; I know him better than you do. I have been with him ever since he left his fort, and don't you imagine the Sioux are able to frighten him or any of his men ! What will he think of us ? He has lengthened his journey in accordance with our request and we undertook to conduct him to the Mandans and back to his fort. He would be with the Mandans to-day if he had not listened to us. Yet you would think of abandoning him and letting him go alone ? That shall never be. If you are afraid of the

Sioux let us have our village here till we return and let the men who are fit to march follow our Father ”.

All the Assiniboinés fell in with this proposal and it was decided only a few warriors should remain at the rendezvous to protect the women and that all the rest should accompany La Verendrye to the chief centre of the Mandans.

With the exception of about fifty persons the whole assembly began to move forward again on November 30, towards the Mandan homes. The third day later, when they were still seventeen miles from the nearest Mandan fort, La Verendrye had the annoyance of discovering that the leather bag in which he had packed the articles he needed daily was missing. One of the Assiniboinés had taken it from the guide's wife who was detailed to carry it on the excuse of relieving her for a while. The Assiniboine then disengaged himself from the other and went back to the camp at the rendezvous. The bag contained, among other valuables, a box filled with the Explorer's papers. So La Verendrye paid two young men to go back to try to recover the bag. They were instructed to rejoin him at the Mandans' forts. They found the culprit and secured the most important part of the contents of the bag, but then, in fear of the Sioux, could not muster

up courage to make the three or four days journey to the Mandans to restore the bag to the Commander.

At noon beside a little river, four miles before the first of the Mandan villages was reached, the travellers found a large party of natives waiting to escort them to the fort. For the comfort of La Verendrye and his associates a great fire had been lighted, and a repast of cooked corn together with a palatable dish made from beans and pumpkin was served there on the river-bank. After the assembly had rested for a couple of hours preparation was made for an impressive entry into the Mandan village.

That afternoon's four miles of marching was to make La Verendrye as close as he was fated to reach to the Western Sea. It is a delectable detail of history that the symbols of civilization as recognized in that age by the French nation were prominently displayed on this crowing day, December 3, 1738. Orderliness characterized the plan of the procession and one of the Commander's sons, relieved at times by the Sieur Nolant de la Marque, carried the flag of France in front of the marching files. The Mandans shouldered La Verendrye and carried him on this his most triumphal day, the day on which he touched the westernmost margin of all his explorations. He would have

preferred walking, but since the tribe chose this method of doing honor to France he acceded to their wishes.

A few yards from the fort on a slight elevation a throng of Indian braves of all ages awaited the on-comers. La Verendrye had his son, the standard-bearer, take a position four paces in front with the flag, Frenchmen and Assiniboinés were in studied rank and all who carried firearms saluted the fort by firing three volleys. La Verendrye made his entry to the Mandan fort at four o'clock in the afternoon.

Amid demonstrations of extravagant joy the French were escorted to the tent of the head chief. La Verendrye was presented with a pipe of peace and was shown the two collars he had sent to the Mandans long before. The crowd thronging about to get a glimpse of the Palefaces was so great that many climbed on the shoulders of the most stalwart.

In deference to his guests the chief ordered the lodge cleared of all the rabble, and at once La Verendrye discovered that the bag in which were carried the presents he intended for the Mandan chiefs had vanished. It contained goods to the value of 300 livres. A more or less thorough going search was made but the valuables were not found. There were many recesses about the fort that would serve as hiding-places, and then it was not clear whether the robbery had been committed by the



Mandans or the Assiniboinés as great numbers of both tribes had been in the crush of people. The bag could have been found, La Verendrye believed, if he had been imperious about the matter. But he considered it was wiser to accept the loss than to place a strain upon the relationships between his people and the Mandans, so the place of concealment was not found.

On December 4 the principal Mandans and the Assiniboinés were assembled in the hut where the Explorer was lodged. They were given presents of powder and balls and La Verendrye remarked to them that they all knew how it happened he had nothing else to give them, that what he had brought to give as presents had all been carried off. He told them he was inclined to stay among them for a considerable time as he could not learn all about their country in a day.

Unbounded joy was expressed by the Mandans at the announcement that La Verendrye would be with them for some time and they assured him he need not be afraid of starving for they had plenty of provisions in reserve, and that all they had was at his service since he was master among them. One of the chiefs said : " Our Father is here in power as if he were at home. We beg him to number us among his children."

La Verendrye's response to this request was to place his hands on the head of each chief, the usual ceremony, and there followed shouts of joy and gratefulness.

The Assiniboinés were addressed then by La Verendrye who told them he was having four of his Frenchmen take news back to the others at Fort La Reine and he wished them to escort the four back to that place with as little delay as possible. He said he had left powder and all necessities for the trip at the rendezvous where the women and children were camping.

There was no move made yet by the Assiniboinés, however, though they had made all the purchases for which they had anything to give in trade. The Mandans were more than a match for the slower-witted Assiniboinés and had fleeced them roundly in matters of commerce. The northerners were selling to the Mandan villagers the guns, axes, kettles, powder, bullets and knives received from the French, and from the Mandans they were buying painted ox-ropes, grain, tobacco, ornamented furs, girdles, circlets for the head, colored plumes and dressed deer-skins. The Mandans had the best of their visitors in bargaining and next proceeded to use their cunning to save their stores of meat and grain from the inroads made on them through victualling 600 ravenous men. A more definite

rumor was sent around about the Sioux being near. It was said their war-party had been seen by Mandan hunters. The Assiniboinés were off at six o'clock the next morning, being in no mind to fight the Sioux on strange ground. A Mandan chief confided to La Verendrye that it was but a ruse on the part of his people to encourage the Assiniboinés to leave for home.

Now a much more appalling misfortune befel than even the loss of the 300 livres worth of presents. The young Cree interpreter took leave unceremoniously and there was no way of holding conversation with the Mandans. La Verendrye had paid the young man liberally and had placed the greatest confidence in him. Assurances had been given every day by the Cree that he would never abandon his employer. These were believed, and in consequence the Explorer had not been at pains to secure at once on his arrival the complete information he wanted about Mandan affairs and about what advice they could offer in connection with his explorations. Fortunately he had made use of each evening (when the embarrassments and interruptions from his swarm of Indian followers ceased) to put a few questions that he could not withhold till after the departure of the Assiniboinés.

The height of misfortune, the decamping of the interpreter, arose from the fact of the

young Cree having become enamoured of an Assiniboine maiden. She did not stay with him but left with her own relations when the false alarm of approaching Sioux was raised. The Cree deserted La Verendrye to follow the girl and win her if he could. Up to the time of the departure of the Cree La Verendrye had made himself understood with ease, for his son could speak the Cree language, the paid interpreter translated what was said from Cree into Assiniboine, and there were several Mandans who understood the Assiniboine dialect. Now, there was no way in which the French could convey their meaning but by signs.

To his great satisfaction La Verendrye had already learned something of the neighboring tribes beyond the Mandans. A day's journey from their furthest fort were the Pananas and the Pananis and with these nations the Mandans had been on the friendliest terms from time immemorial till three or four years before La Verendrye's visit. The causes of war arising between the Mandans and the others was a subject La Verendrye and the chief had put off to discuss when there was leisure.

The Pananas had horses, the Mandans stated, and went on long excursions down the Missouri and the Mississippi as far as the Spanish settlements. These tribes further down the Missouri than the Mandans were as

fair as themselves. They worked in iron, (the term meant all manner of metals). They marched on horseback both in hunting and in warfare, and they could not be killed by arrow or musket, being encased in iron. But by killing the horse, the rider could be caught easily as he could not run in his armour. The women were never seen in the fields. Their forts and houses were of stone.

The river-banks, La Verendrye was told, were wooded in places and islands of trees marked the prairie. When the Explorer asked how long it would take to reach these whites who were horsemen he was told it needed a whole summer. The information was added gratuitously that since the Mandans were at war with the Pananas their men would not undertake to escort anybody far in that direction. The road was not open. They told La Verendrye that cattle were in great numbers on the prairies down the river, far larger and fatter than those in the north. He was shown horns split in half that held nearly three pints and were used as ladles. All the butts had these so he could judge how great was the number of cattle hunted when the tribes were friendly and the road was open.

The Mandans themselves, La Verendrye learned, had six forts, five of which were along the banks of the Missouri. The sixth, the one in which he was lodging, was on a butte in

the open prairie. The fortifications were suggestive of other nations than Indian. The walls of the forts were protected by ditches 15 feet deep and from 15 to 18 feet wide, so that hostile tribes could not attack them. Steps or posts of wood were put in place when the members of the tribe wished to leave or enter and these could be removed quickly when danger of the Sioux arose.

The Mandan forts comprised as many as 130 lodges each, and these were lined up in symmetrical array. The cleanliness that pervaded the huts was remarked upon by the French. Planks were used for dividing the houses into two or three neat and spacious rooms. Large reserve supplies of maize, beans and furs were stocked in cavelike places around the forts.

Signs of a mixture of races were evident in the Mandans. Many of them were not so dark of skin as other Indians, and some of the women had blonde hair. The men were tall and both men and women were pleasing of face. Tattooing of half their bodies was one of their traces of vanity. All were industrious and thrifty. They cultivated maize, beans and pumpkins and manufactured earthen vessels in which to cook these products. Their amusements included a kind of ball-game.

Buffalo skins made up the complete wardrobes of the men. The women indulged in somewhat more elaborate toilettes. Gowns of very soft deerskin were worn by the women who displayed special taste in dress. The bedding was entirely of skins. All clothing and vessels for use when travelling were kept in bags hung on posts. The Mandans were skilful at tanning and coloring buffalo and ox-skins and knew how to make wickerware as well as pottery. They held feasts in high regard and banquetted the French generously. The Sieur de la Marque and the younger La Verendryes accepted invitations to many of their celebrations but the Explorer did not attend the gatherings and to him were brought several times a day servings of well-cooked wheat, beans and pumpkin.

About a week after the Assiniboines left, La Verendrye had one of his sons, Monsieur Nolant de la Marque, six Frenchmen and several Mandans go to the second Mandan fort, on the east side of the Missouri River, to learn what they could "by signs and demonstrations". They were asked to spend a few nights there, if they were well received, and get all the information possible about the course of the river. After their departure, La Verendrye and Monsieur Nathan de la Marque

walked about the fort where they lodged studying all the details that could be of use to them.

The group who went to the second fort returned on January 4, 1739, bringing an account of their kind reception and of amusing incidents that arose through want of understanding of each other's language. The second fort was twice as large as the one at which La Verendrye stayed. They could grasp enough of the natives' conversation to learn that at the lower part of the river were men resembling the French who made linen and other cloth and had wars with the Indians.

One the evening of January 7, La Verendrye and Monsieur de la Marque talked over the situation and decided that they must set out almost at once for Fort La Reine (Portage La Prairie). The lack of an interpreter affected their plans most seriously. It was the worst season of the year for a 300-mile tramp over unfamiliar prairies, yet they had few articles left for presents and so could not hope to get guides to take them exploring ; their supply of powder might run short before spring ; and the floods in spring might prevent their getting back to Fort La Reine (since they had no canoes with them) if they waited till warm weather.

While they were canvassing the situation and considering every element that could prove



useful in helping find the Sea, the idea presented itself of having a couple of their men stay behind to study the language of the Mandans that they need not again find themselves at the mercy of a fickle savage. La Verendrye's personal attendant was the quickest and strongest of intellect among his men, and the most apt in the study of languages, so he willingly sacrificed his own pleasure in having this attached servant around him and thought only of the future success of the expedition. La Marque selected the most intelligent among his men, one who was something of a scribe and capable in many ways. La Verendrye gave full instructions to the pair of men who were to stay behind, and La Marque promised them he would send someone to look after them during the summer (1739) and bring word of the plans for proceeding west.

When the Assiniboinés were leaving the Mandans, the chief of the former tribe had brought five of his men to La Verendrye with instructions that they were to stay with him and be his guides when he wished to leave for home. La Verendrye had rewarded the chief with presents then and promised further proofs of his gratefulness. Now, having made the decision to return to Fort La Reine, La Verendrye showed the five Assiniboinés by signs (having no other way of making himself understood) that he would set out shortly and

that he wished two of them and two Frenchmen to start the next morning for the Assiniboine village (which is believed to have been on the Mouse River just south of what is now the international boundary line, in North Dakota) and let the men there know the Explorer and his party were leaving the Mandans four days later. The four men started off on the morning of January 8.

There were many protestations of regret on the part of the Mandans when they understood the Frenchmen were planning to leave. The Explorer told them of his desire that two of his men remain in his place and asked that they should be well taken care of and he let the Mandans know he would not abandon them. He asked for some wheat flour for the journey. When this was brought, more than enough, he gave some needles in return. Seeing this, in a short time everybody hastened to bring some flour, for needles were highly valued; and they would have loaded a hundred men for the journey.

Provision having been made for his own people on their return trip, La Verendrye next took official leave of the Mandans. He had the chiefs and the principal men assemble and to these he presented powder, balls and some trifles that meant much to the savages. He had many things he wished to say to them and deeply lamented not being able to make them

understand. He gave the head chief a French flag and a leaden plate beribboned at the corners. It was placed in a box and left with the Mandans in token of the lands there having been taken possession of in the name of the French. La Verendrye thought the plate of lead would be kept more safely by the head of the tribe passing it down from father to son than if it had been buried in the earth with a chance of its being stolen.

The diligence La Verendrye had shown that day left him with few matters unattended to and he thought of making his departure earlier than he had given notice of to the runners who went ahead. But during the night between the eighth and the ninth of January he became seriously ill. "I did not know what to make of it", wrote La Verendrye who throughout all his explorations showed slight inclination to talk of himself. For three days he had to remain in bed but on the fourth day he was somewhat improved and he prepared to leave the next morning. All the remedies he carried on the expedition happened to be in the bag that had been stolen from his servant and he hoped to recover them when he reached the Indian village.

The final commissions left with the pair of Frenchmen who were staying to learn the Mandan dialect were for them to discover all they could (as soon as they could converse with

the natives) about the nation of whites, about the metals they worked with, and about their mines. They were to ask just as many questions about the nations further up the Missouri, too. La Verendrye gave them funds enough to defray their expenses liberally, and even to pay a guide if for any reason they should need to return to Fort La Reine before a French party came back to the Mandans.

One of the chiefs walked two or three miles with La Verendrye and as they took leave of each other there were compliments from the savage and presents from the Explorer and a request that care would be taken of the two Frenchmen who were staying. The chief made signs that meant he would have one of them stay with him. (The other was to be at a different fort in order that they might learn the language and the ways of the tribe more quickly). That evening, the Explorer observed that only two of the Assiniboines were with his company, and on inquiring about the missing one was told that he had stayed behind with the two Frenchmen, not wishing to abandon them. He meant to stay with them till summertime.

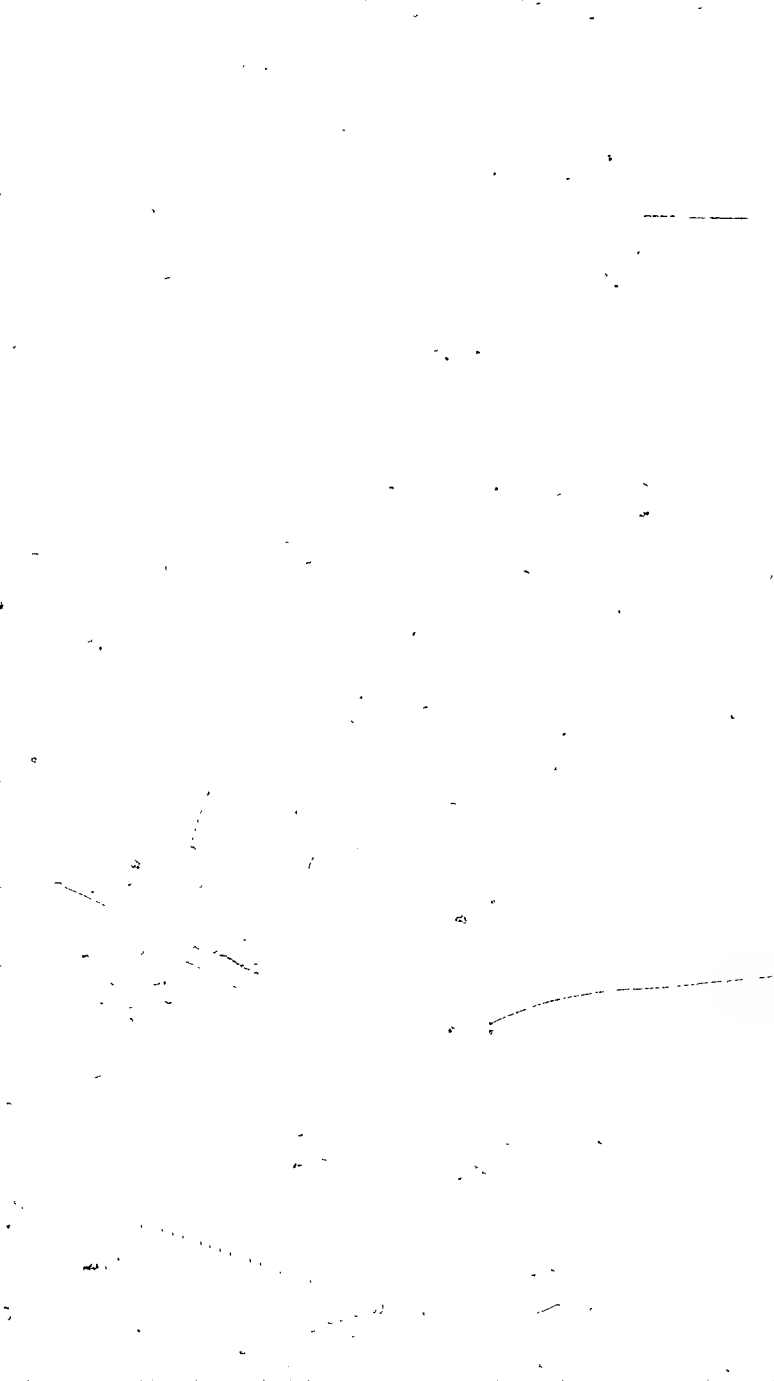
Excessively cold days for the journey made matters worse for La Verendrye who was still very ill, and he had to stay three days at the Assiniboine village. He recovered his

box of papers and medicines at that place. The light-fingered ones had been satisfied with emptying the rest of the contents of the bag the slave had carried. La Verendrye could not resist asking the Assiniboinés why they had told him fairy-tales about the Mandans. To his reproaches the artful ones replied that they had been talking of the tribes beyond the Mandans. One warrior asserted that he did not lie : that La Verendrye had not understood properly what was said. He solemnly assured him that last summer he had killed a man who was covered with iron, having first killed his horse. La Verendrye asked for a little token of proof, but was told that other men on horseback came along just as the boastful one was about to cut off his victim's head. In his hurried flight he kept nothing, having even thrown off his own blanket.

Two more weeks of tramping in the bitter winter weather accentuated La Verendrye's illness so greatly that he was compelled to remain for a long while at a point 125 miles from Fort La Reine. When it was realized how serious was his sickness, Monsieur La Marque made up his mind to hurry on ahead to Fort La Reine to send more assistance to the Commandant. Ten days later La Verendrye managed to proceed but he had great need of the assistance which reached him when

he was about 80 miles from the Fort. All his fortitude was needed during those weeks of travelling in the teeth of a gnawingly cold wind, but, with his accustomed brevity when it was something of personal concern in his diary he dismissed the subject with a line : " I have never endured so much wretchedness in my life from illness and fatigue as on that journey". A two weeks rest at Fort La Reine, which he reached March 10, 1739, brought him a degree of restoration.

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## CHAPTER XIX

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### DISCOVERY OF THE SASKATCHEWAN

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Whence bloweth the Canada wind ?  
Its path is the way to the world's white rim,  
The strange white tracts of the barren zone,  
Immutable, luminous, wild and lone ;  
Spaces enduring through aeons dim,  
Veiling the sea, and the blue sea's brim,  
Striving for ever, yet never free,  
Fetters which ever bind—  
The Canada wind is the keen north wind,  
The wind of the secret sea,  
And quickens the soul of me.

—HELEN M. MERRILL,  
"The Canada Wind".

HAPPILY ONE RECORDS that this very gloomy spring furnished the Explorer with a clue that led to one of his most magnificent exploration successes. The new information, secured through his questioning of Indians from the margin of lands still under a veil of mystery, was about the broad Saskatchewan River, the Poskoyac it was called by the Red men then, and his own triumphant announcement ran : " I have discovered a river that extends far to the west. All the rivers and lakes I have found before flow to the north, Hudson's Bay, except the Mandans' River



(the Missouri). I will explore this discovery this summer, either in person or through others working on my behalf". He previously knew the name of the river but not that it lay in a direction to serve his purpose.

La Verendrye had found a route that would take him by water into the heart of the Rockies, and his country had found a man capable of proceeding with tremendous undertakings and mocking at the horrid faces of poverty, sickness and starvation !

Affairs at Fort La Reine were in almost as bad a shape as could be, so low were the provisions, and word came that the men at Fort Maurepas were on the verge of starvation. La Marque the Elder waited only till La Verendrye's return to Fort La Reine when he left with the Commandant's permission for Fort Maurepas. He asked that his brother and some of their men might stay at Fort La Reine where it was hoped more Indians might congregate, bringing game. The 42 persons at Fort La Reine were nearly starving when two lodges of Indians were seen passing and these La Verendrye asked to stop and do what they could to supply his men. They saved the little garrison by hunting moose and deer.

From Mr. La Marque the dismal news came that he dreaded a famine, having seen no Indians.

Something of the unconquerable quality of La Verendrye's will may be guessed from the fact that he now sent his son and others to build a fort on Lake Manitoba, to make a circuit of Lake Winnipeg and explore particularly the rivers that entered it. He was chiefly interested in knowing about the Saskatchewan River and whether or not it would be wise to select a site for a fort near its mouth. The heroic element is recognized when it is learned that later on the very same day as Pierre and an Indian companion left to explore the northern lakes the entry the Commandant made in his Journal was this : "We are now at the 16th of April and have not yet seen any one ; I do not know how God preserves us".

After having visited the Mandans and satisfied himself that the Missouri and the Mississippi were not to be depended upon to lead him towards a Western Sea, La Verendrye was anxious to study next all the country around his prairie Fort that he might learn the best route to select for future expeditions. As soon as canoes arrived from the East he planned to go northwards himself to take note of the rivers flowing into Lake Winnipeg, Lake Manitoba and Cedar Lake. In addition to keeping the main purpose in mind, La Verendrye was acting in accordance with a business suggestion from the Crees when he

directed his son Pierre to make a search for a good site for a new fort. The Indians urged him to be early at the mouth of the Saskatchewan in the spring in order to intercept the furs that were going from the far West to the forts at the Hudson's Bay. Pierre was authorized to do all he could to lend assurance to the Indians that the French would have a trading-post in the region of the lakes soon.

The Sieur Nathan de la Marque sent a letter to La Verendrye from Fort Maurepas on Lake Winnipeg on April 23 notifying him that none of the Indians had yet come to his trading-post and saying he intended to go up the Winnipeg River towards Fort St Charles to find the Indians at the point on the river where they were building canoes.

La Verendrye thought La Marque was making a mistake in leaving Fort Maurepas so early in the spring, for Indians from up the Red River might come along with their furs after his departure. About the same date an Indian reported to La Verendrye that a large band of Assiniboines were camping on Lake Manitoba working on canoes preparatory to going with their furs to Hudson's Bay. Monsieur Sanchagrin and a hired man were sent at once to suggest to them that they bring their cargoes to the French fort. Five or six days later five Assiniboines came to report that a

large band of the Assiniboines would be along soon. On May 2 the band came to the Fort. It proved a mere handful.

Monsieur Nolant de la Marque grew desperately alarmed over the shortage of food at the Fort (La Reine) and on May 10 asked La Verendrye to allow him and his men to leave. Because the case was put urgently La Verendrye granted his permission though it grieved him sincerely to see them leave while he had nothing to offer them as rations on the way.

Fifteen Assiniboines came on the night of May 10 to tell La Verendrye of sixty lodges of Indians who intended to visit Fort La Reine but had been told it was closed. The messengers were given presents of tobacco and asked to take these to the prospective patrons and assure them they would be welcomed at the Fort. A week later they came and their transactions were quickly made. Three others came on May 20 and said they knew of thirty lodges who were coming. Again gifts of tobacco were sent in the hope of hastening the canoeists, for La Verendrye wanted to get the winter's furs off eastward speedily. He held his canoes till May 27, but it was unprofitable to have done so, for only a few hunters came with their furs.

The business men who had taken over the forts from La Verendrye (paying him a

rental) and who were responsible for seeing that they were victualled were failing him so perilously that he himself would not have ventured to stay at the most westerly one longer were it not for his son being on the trip to the further north and his Frenchman and La Marque's being with the Mandans.

The canoes that left Fort La Reine with furs on May 27 for the Grand Portage (near Fort William) were expected to meet there the food supplies required for La Verendrye's men and the merchandise needed for trade with the Indians. His men waited nearly three weeks at the Portage watching in vain for the provisions that would make it possible for the Explorer to start upon a vaster enterprise than any accomplished yet. But in the end they had to set out on Lake Superior and make the difficult and dangerous trip to Fort Michillimakinac, the while their only food was tripe.

At Michillimakinac a double disaster faced the Explorer's men. First, they were presented with the Intendant's authorization that beaver-skins to the value of 4,000 pounds should be seized on behalf of La Verendrye's outfitters in the east; second, the fact was learned that no merchandise had been forwarded for restocking the trading-posts. The seizure of the furs was made as a measure of protection for the creditors in the east who had learned that Laverendrye was in debt to men at Michilli

makinac for certain supplies. The easterners had taken fright lest the merchants nearer to the base of the explorations would be the first to be paid.

La Verendrye's own calmly-worded version of the next move on the part of the canoe-men runs : " In the straits in which my people found themselves they appealed to the Commandant at Michillimakinac and told him the risk I should run in the interior of the country if I did not receive assistance. He helped them get a small quantity of goods at a very high price and they came back to me on October 20 in three canoes with a very small cargo but a larger number of men. I was in a hard position, and was compelled to abandon the plans I had for erecting forts, and all for lack of goods."

The two Frenchmen who were left among the Mandans by La Verendrye when he came back in the winter from his visit south arrived at Fort La Reine on September 29, 1739, piloted by the Assiniboine savage who was selected to stay with them while they were in the Missouri River country. The pair who represented the expedition had made excellent use of their time while among the Mandans and brought news that many visitors from other tribes, 200 lodges of them, spent part of June with the Mandans. They brought skins

dressed and ornamented with plumes and porcupine quills and in exchange for these the Mandans gave them grain and beans.

On one tribe which announced itself as coming from the land of the setting sun the Frenchmen had centred their attention. When they visited the cabins of this western tribe they were told by one man that he had been brought up among white men. He said he would take the Frenchmen to see these white families who would be friendly. The white men lived in towns and in brick and white stone forts, and possessed horses. To reach them a long detour needed to be made on account of the Serpent Indians who lived between the Mandans and the white men.

The chief from the west spoke of the nation to the great master of life, using books that seemed to be "made of the leaves of Indian corn", and that they assembled in large houses for prayer. He displayed a cross he had worn on his neck since infancy. He had also a cotton shirt and an embroidered quilt to show them. The sandals worn by these white people were described; the women's coiffures, bracelets and collars; and the warriors' cuirasses and saddle-cloths. There was a country of blacks to cross before reaching these white men, but there was no fear of starving on the route for many deer and cattle roamed the lands. The houses had good floors and comfortable beds

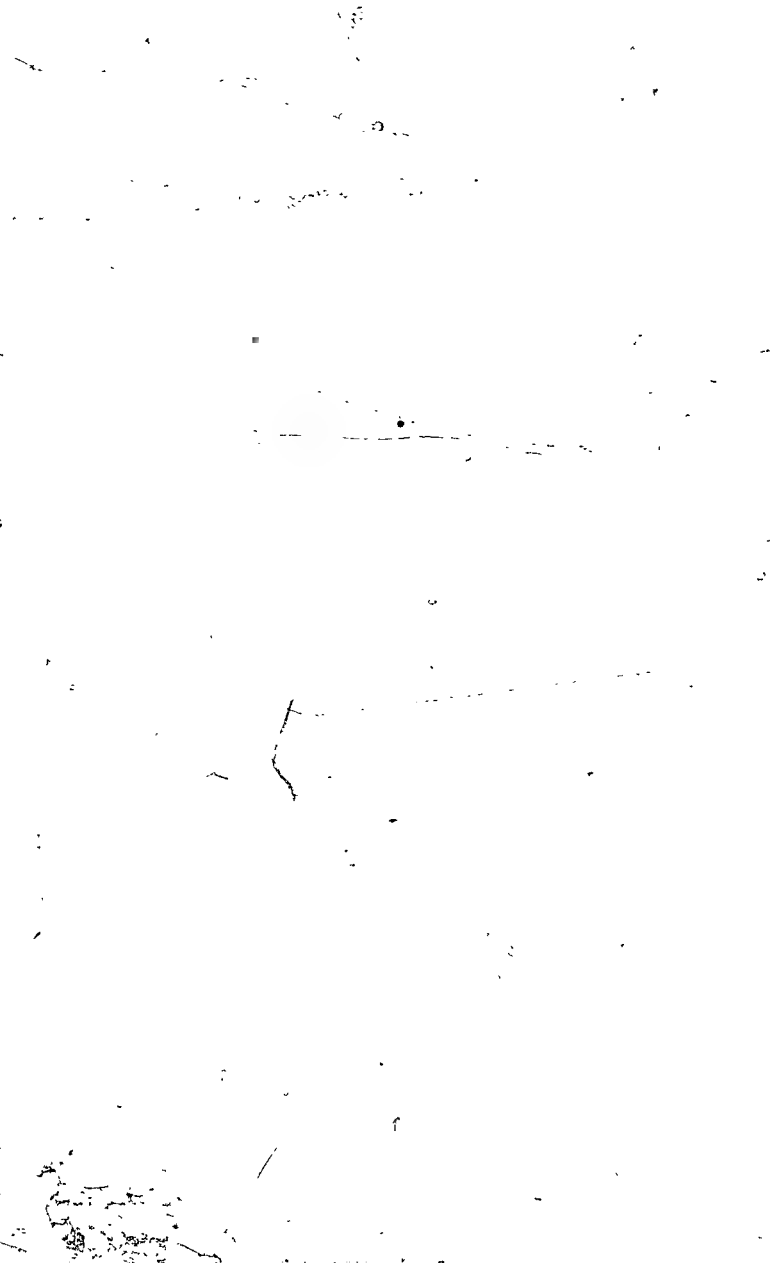
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and in the middle of the rooms were large flares to give light. The towns were strongly walled and protected by ditches. The chief desired to have the pleasure of taking the two Frenchmen to this country and then coming back with them to visit La Verendrye's forts. But the Frenchmen had to decline the offer. They told the chief they could not go without La Verendrye's permission, and also that they had expended their presents among the Mandans and had nothing for further travels.

La Verendrye's wife, she who had been Marie-Anne Dandonneau, died in Montreal on September 25, 1739.

When the three canoes came on October 20 (1739) bearing a very small amount of goods La Verendrye recognized that he would be obliged to go to Montreal once more to make sounder financial arrangements if his venture was not to be wrecked. For the winter he had very little merchandise and the barest of necessities, but it was then too late in the year to leave for the east. He would have to spend the summer of 1740 on the way to Montreal and the summer of 1741 on the way back to the prairie, and after that,—his aspirations flamed as brightly as in his boyhood and he pictured himself and one of his sons crossing the prairie via the Mandan forts while the Chevalier and the third son went westward as far as the Saskatchewan would take them.





## CHAPTER XX

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### ON THE PERENNIAL SEARCH FOR FUNDS

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**F**ORT LA REINE was placed in the spring of 1740 under the command of the Chevalier before La Verendrye started on his journey to Quebec to represent to the Governor how completely out of resources he found himself. The Explorer reached Fort Michillimakinac at the middle of July. While at that point he was able to secure provisions and goods for gifts for the Indians and he had these shipped forward to his sons at Fort La Reine ; and at the same time sent the Chevalier instructions to start out that fall along with two Frenchmen (doubtless the two who had been with the Mandans for several months) for the land of the Mandans for further explorations west of the Missouri River. Everything the Chevalier required for his men and for paying for guides from among the Mandans for taking them on Sea-wards was sent to him from Michillimakinac.

La Verendrye must have thought some ominous power was moving heaven and earth

to bring his explorations to insignificance for he had scarcely disembarked from his canoe at Montreal on August 25, 1740, when he was involved in a lawsuit concerning the trading-posts he had established. He admitted having a horror of court-proceedings for they were completely outside of his experience, and he wrote, "I settled the matter to my great loss, though I was far from having done anyone any wrong". The records of a bargain signed on November 12, 1740, by La Verendrye with Monsieur Nolant de la Marque and Monsieur Gamelin speak of La Verendrye undertaking to deliver 75 packages of beaver-skins in settlement of certain claims, which probably had to do with the lawsuit.

The fact of La Verendrye being in the service of the French Government as a concessionaire made it necessary for the Government to be in possession of the facts both about the seizure of his furs in the West in the summer of 1739 and of the lawsuit at Montreal in 1740.

As for the seizure, the Ordinance preserved by the Archives shows that M. De-Lorme, a Montreal merchant, alleged that La Verendrye had received from him goods to the value of 680 livres, 12 sols and 6 deniers for his exploitation and commerce in the Upper Country. Payment was to be made in August, 1741, and meantime La Verendrye promised to

send as soon as he reached the Upper Country (in 1738) one thousand pounds of beaver-skins with a canoe-load of other peltries on account of the obligation. From these furs some of the creditors were to be kept satisfied till the whole was paid. De Lorme supposed there were no creditors of La Verendrye's elsewhere; but learned later that Louis Daillébout, at Michillimakinac, had a claim against the Explorer, and that the western merchant was to collect his furs in settlement of this claim at the fort that was the commercial rendezvous for all the Great Lakes neighborhood. Knowing that, he decided to protect himself and La Verendrye's other Montreal furnishers by seizing the furs. Closing the correspondence about this matter, the Intendant Hocquart wrote on September 27, 1741, to Versailles that "the affair was a very simple one involving only a precautionary seizure". The parties had come to an understanding in the Governor's presence, and the Governor said the case was closed.

The other financial matter, the one involving a lawsuit, La Verendrye straightened away as quickly as he could make provision for it, and on October 12, 1742, the Marquis de Beauharnois completed the correspondence with the Court about it: "The Sieur de Vercheres informs me under date of September 9 that he has paid to the Sieur Nolant de la Marque and Company the 56 packets which the

Sieur de la Verendrye owed to that firm, and that he has had 24 others sent to the Sieur Le Gros for the merchandise which that company had left in the posts of the West. 'Consequently, Monseigneur, that affair has been settled'.

From Montreal, after disentangling his business threads, La Verendrye went on in the autumn of 1740 to Quebec to give an account of his explorations throughout the seasons of his second expedition to the West. The Governor treated him with approval greater than ever and entertained him at his own residence till he commissioned him to return to the West in the spring of 1741 and continue his explorations.

The Governor wrote from Quebec on May 12, 1741, to the Court : " I will despatch the Sieur de la Verendrye to his post to continue his discovery.. Father Cöquart is to accompany him ". This did not mean that he was assuming any responsibility for paying the expenses of the explorations he was commanding the great Voyageur to pursue. But La Verendrye's genius for getting things accomplished stood him in good stead once more and he procured some supplies, with the proviso inserted in the agreement that a number of clerks accompany him to look after the interests of the men who furnished the wherewithal for this, La Verendrye's third, expedition.

While in the St Lawrence cities La Verendrye was made aware of malicious rumours that were being circulated by his commercial and political rivals who had contrived to draw the French Minister of the Navy, Monsieur de Maurepas, into sympathy with their attitude toward the Explorer, to the extent of regretting that he had given La Verendrye the privilege of carrying on the fur-trade in the West.

To accusations that he was enriching himself and exploring but half-heartedly, La Verendrye made the whimsical reply, "If the debts that I have on my shoulders to the amount of 40,000 livres are an advantage, I may flatter myself that I am very rich". It was at this time the Explorer wrote: "Money never has been my object. I have sacrificed myself and my sons for the service and the good of the Colony. *What advantages may result from my toils the future will tell.* In all my misfortunes I have the consolation of knowing that the Governor of Canada appreciates my motives, recognizes the uprightness of my purposes, and continues to do me justice in spite of the opposition and uncharitable remarks of certain parties."

La Verendrye left Montreal for the West on June 26, 1741, (a little later in the month than his dates of leaving in 1731 and 1738), accompanied by Father Coquart who had been assigned to him by the Jesuits as his missionary.

On his way down the year before La Verendrye had been talking with Father du Jaunay at Michillimakinac and learned that the priest would take pleasure in going with him to the land of the Mandans. Father du Jaunay wrote then to the Superior of the Jesuits in Canada asking to be allowed to follow this plan, but he had been refused on the pretext that it was best for him to remain where he already knew the language of the natives. While La Verendrye and Father Coquart were still at Michillimakinac in the summer of 1741, they learned that orders had been received for Father Coquart not to proceed any further west. The excuse given was the expensiveness of having him go to the more distant posts, but the Commandant of the expedition thought the reversal in plans was connected with the opposition to his venture organized by his rivals. Father Coquart later was allowed to proceed west.

Fort St Charles was reached on September 19, (1741), and all was found in good order, except that the Indians in the Rainy Lake and Lake of the Woods country were singing their war-songs and making preparations for a great battle with the Sioux. Presents were distributed by way of persuasion for them to keep to their hunting-grounds, and their promises were given ; but the temptations of the war-path proved stronger than their

resolutions about staying peacefully at work. Some months later La Verendrye wrote of the Crees and Monsonis having made a simultaneous attack on the Sioux but the aggressors met with great loss. "It will take a long time to bring peaceful relationships among these nations who from time immemorial have been deadly enemies" he stated, and events proved undeniably that he was right.

Hurrying on to the prairie, consumed with eagerness to know how his son had succeeded on his journey to the Missouri River the fall before, La Verendrye sighted Fort La Reine on October 13, (1741). To his deep disappointment he found that the visit to the forts of the Mandans had not furthered the desired discovery. No guides could be secured among the Mandans to take the trio of Frenchmen towards the Sea, though they waited for two months for certain Indians who were expected to arrive from far west tribes. They hoped to be piloted by these, but in the end found they would not arrive at the Mandans' forts till spring. So the leader and his companions returned to Fort La Reine, being too small a party to risk penetrating the wilderness alone. They brought with them to La Reine two horses, an embroidered coverlet and four little porcelain jars purchased from the Mandans. The coverlet and jars were forwarded the next year by La Verendrye to



the Governor at Quebec in token that civilization had touched the lives of one group of Indians who visited the Mandans.

Directly after the Explorer resumed the command of Fort La Reine, his oldest son was despatched to the north of Lake Manitoba to establish a fort in the direction of the great Saskatchewan River. This fort, which was named Dauphin, was built in response to the wish of Indians who were accustomed to going down the Nelson River to trade at the English forts on the Bay. It was located on the north-west shore of Lake Dauphin, less than 100 yards up from the water's edge, and between one and two miles from the mouth of Valley River. The route followed by Pierre was north across Lake Manitoba, then through the southern end of Lake Winnipegosis and through the Mossy River to Lake Dauphin. Work on Fort Bourbon had been commenced in the winter of 1740-1741 by the Commandant's sons while he was in the East. It was still nearer the Saskatchewan. The site chosen was at the mouth of the Red Deer River at the extreme north-western part of Lake Winnipegosis.

Dauntless Pierre and one of his brothers, (probably Louis-Joseph, since he had received instruction in map-making), and two other French-Canadians were sent in the spring of 1742 from Fort La Reine to the Mandan forts

to pursue explorations from that part of the continent. They left on April 29, well equipped, and it was hoped they would arrive at the right time of the year to fall in with the Horse Indians who came often to the Mandan country. They would try to engage men of that tribe to guide them to the white people said to live by the Sea. La Verendrye himself could not accompany this expedition because of the Indian uprisings that were a disturbing factor in connection with his forts.

Two weeks after seeing the quartet off on their 500-mile trip to reach the base of another trip that would be of unknown length La Verendrye wrote to Quebec his report of what was happening in the West : " The discovery was not made last year for lack of a guide.. I hope next year to be able to give an exact account of that civilized white nation living to the west of this country on the shore of the Sea. Not being able to leave the fort myself on account of the war that is being carried on very vigorously between our nations here and the Sioux, I have sent two of my sons who are well versed in the manners and languages of the savages on an expedition and have reason to hope for their success.. If it is a country hitherto unknown, they are to take possession in the name of the King.. The joy and great zeal with which they set out give me good hope,

relying on the help of God. I hope to receive news of them this autumn.. I am sending a coverlet of embroidered cotton with some porcelain articles, made by those whites, to the Marquis de Beauharnois. My eldest son brought them last autumn from the country of the Mandans.. I established a new fort at the request of the Mountain Crees last fall near the Lake of the Prairies (Manitoba Lake) and named it Fort Dauphin ”.

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## CHAPTER XXI

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### THE DISCOVERY OF THE ROCKIES

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This expedition, so seriously beset with perils, through the vast plains of the West is a lasting testimonial to the unflinching courage, the powers of endurance and the ingenious resourcefulness of La Verendrye's sons.

Brave sons of La Verendrye, Canadians are proud of you ! You have crowned our race with the immortal glory of discoverers of our rich territories and by your gigantic deeds you compel the admiration of all who read of your wonderful explorations extending to the very Foot-hills of the Rocky Mountains on which you planted the flag of France.

—L. A. PRUD'HOMME.

**T**HE CHEVALIER and his brother, together with Louis La Londette and A. Miotte, left Fort La Reine on April 29, 1742, on the trip that was to become the most spectacular of all the many thousands of miles making up the complete Verendryean journeyings. Less than three weeks brought them to the Mandan forts where they hoped to have the good fortune to meet with some of the Indian tribe who were horsemen. But though these men were expected from day to day, and though

the party of four from Fort La Reine waited for more than two months there was still no sign of them. The Chevalier was determined not to retrace his steps this summer without having explored new areas and he engaged a couple of Mandans to guide him and his companions to the country of the Horse Indians. For three weeks they travelled over rolling plains seeing coyotes, antelope and badgers but not a sign of a human habitation.

At a mountain near which the Horse Indians were likely to be found it was decided to build a sheltering cabin and wait till the natives chanced to come along. Fires were lighted on all sides for signals though the members of the little party knew the danger of being discovered by hostile tribes. At the end of August (1742) one of the Mandan guides resigned from his position, received liberal payment and went back home. For two more weeks the five men remaining explored through the hills and at last were rewarded by seeing a spiral of smoke far to the southwest. The Chevalier sent one of the interpreters and the remaining Mandan to interview the people who should be found near the column of smoke and who proved to be the Beaux Hommes, Handsome Men, (perhaps the Crow Indians). The next day the two scouts returned to the cabin accompanied by some of the young men who invited all the

strangers to their lodges. The second Mandan guide had had all the adventures he wanted, and fearing to get among unfriendly tribes, he now asked permission to return home. He, too, was well paid and provided with requisites for his trip home.

The Chevalier and the three other French-Canadians stayed with the Handsome Men three weeks, leaving them on November 9. They were beginning to understand their language well enough for practical purposes and the leader asked if some of their men would take his party to the land of the Horse Indians. They said they would conduct them to the nearest village, two days travelling distant. But the folk here were Little Foxes. The guides were asked to explain that the white men wanted to find the Horse Indians, and then all the village set out with them. It went on in the same way for ten days, each new tribe welcoming the French but disclaiming any knowledge of the Sea. As they were going in a southerly direction, the Chevalier was prepared to come upon the Spaniards or upon a Sea they had discovered. The presents offered by the Frenchmen proved the magic wand that made the way smooth for them.

A village that was in a state of desolation was reached on November 19 and proved to be one of the Horse Indian settlements. The wailing was because of nearly all the families

having been wiped out by the Snake Indians that week. These latter were said to be friendly to no one and to be ruthlessness itself. The summer before they had ravaged seventeen villages, killing all the old men and women and trading the young women as slaves at the seacoast for horses and merchandise.

News about the Sea could not be got from the Horse Indians but a few gifts persuaded the remnant of the villagers to pilot the Frenchmen by a long detour around the home of the Snakes to the land of the Bow Indians who were friendly with tribes who went to the Sea to trade. The chief of the Bow tribe was very courteous and had the 'strangers' belongings all brought to his teepee, and gave orders that their horses were to be taken care of. The Chevalier wrote : "Up to that time we had been well received in all the villages through which we passed, but all the civilities were as nothing compared with the admirable behaviour of the great chief of the Bow tribe, a man not at all covetous as the others had been, but willing to take great care of all that belonged to us. I became attached to this chief who merited all our friendship".

Quick at learning languages, the Chevalier soon was able to converse with the Bow chief, and he asked him if he knew the white men who lived by the Sea and could guide him to their homes.

The chief was as willing to oblige with rumours as all the other Indians the La Verendrye explorers had encountered in the last eleven years. His information he acknowledged to be gained by hearsay from prisoners taken by the Snake Indians. He then and there invited the four Frenchmen to go with his Bow warriors towards the mountains on the war-path against the Snakes. His descriptions of the men at the sea-coast, and his naming of a few of their words which the Chevalier recognized as Spanish seemed to indicate that no fresh exploration was left in that quarter for the French to make. "All this dampened my ardor for the search of an unknown Sea", wrote the leader. But he marched westward with them.

The snowy magnificence of the Rocky Mountains was viewed for the first time by civilized men on January 1, 1743, two centuries and a half since the discovery of the continent. The Chevalier and his brother had won the distinction of reaching first of all white men the Foot-hills of the Rockies. The castellated crags towards which they were riding were part of the Big Horn Range, 120 miles east of Yellowstone Park.

Within the next few days the furthest western point of the La Verendrye expedition was reached. None of the explorers of their





name were destined to make their way through the Rockies nor even to look upon the majestic peaks again.

During the days of marching towards the battle-ground the band of Bow Indians had been steadily growing as they marched through villages on the magnificent prairie where wild animals were plentiful. The warriors alone numbered 2000, and their wives and families made up a formidable company. As they advanced the Indian chief continually urged the Chevalier to accompany his men to war but the latter said it was his purpose to have peace among the nations and not to help stir up war. The chief was persistent and pointed out that the Snakes were enemies of everybody and besides he could not accompany the Frenchmen further till after his tribes ended the war. He besought the Frenchmen to go with him as spectators ; they need not expose themselves. The Chevalier and his companions conferred about the question, and it seemed needful to acquiesce or else to give up their expectation of viewing the Ocean from the top of the mountains.

A ceremonious grand council was called as soon as the white men promised to be spectators of the war. The plans of warfare were talked over with much thought given to the safety of the women and children. "Then they turned to us", reported the Chevalier.

"They begged us not to abandon them. I made the reply to the chief of the Bows, who repeated it to the entire assemblage, that the great chief of the French desired that all his children should live peacefully and had ordered us to carry peace to all nations, wishing to see the whole world calm and peaceful ; but that, knowing their anger to be aroused with good cause, I bowed my head in submission and would accompany them, since they desired it so urgently, to aid them merely with advice, in case they required it. They thanked us effusively and went through long ceremonies with the calumet."

All the company marched till January 8 and then a camp was made. The next day the warriors proceeded. The younger La Varendrye was left to guard the white men's baggage which was placed in the chief's lodge. Most of the men were on horseback. Four days of riding brought them to the mountains, wooded and majestic. The young Bows who went reconnoitring around the main village of the Snake tribe returned with the news that the Snakes had suddenly fled in haste abandoning their cabins and most of their belongings.

The reputation for bravery held by the Snakes left the Bows to interpret this move as meaning the Snakes had slipped off to attack the women and children they (the Bows) left camping at a four days' journey to the rear.

The Snakes had terrorized all the tribes and the chief of the Bows could not get his men to listen when he tried to allay their fears. Two thousand men were off, each choosing his own route down the side of the mountains towards the encampment.

Sympathy with the plight of the explorers was shown by the chief. "It is very annoying to have brought you to this point and not be able to go further", he said.

The savage could not comprehend the depth of remorse that filled the soul of the leader. In only lesser degree his two French companions regretted this death-blow to their hopes. It was an unspeakably tantalizing turn of fortune that prevented their reaching the summit of the great mountain ranges and gazing upon the Sea after having crossed a thousand miles of prairie on their quest. Could they have known there still lay between them and the Pacific a thousand miles of mountain fastnesses they might have retraced their way less reluctantly.

Pierre La Verendrye rode along with the chief of the Bows and the two Frenchmen followed. Their horses were tired and few places were found where they could graze. After some hours La Verendrye had an instinctive feeling ("without looking around", he expressed it), that the two were missing. He told the Bow chief that the Frenchmen were

no longer in the party and then wheeled round at full speed in search of them. The chief had barely time to assure him he would tell every member of the band and they would help find the missing ones.

To allow their horses to refresh themselves on the grass at the edge of a bluff was the reason for the couple having dropped behind. The leader sighted them. Directly after he joined them he saw fifteen savages approaching from the woods, one far in advance of the rest, and all with bows and arrows ready for action. As they prepared to attack the three white men, La Verendrye fired several shots. The fifteen natives of the foot-hills vanished promptly, having legendary knowledge, no doubt, of the superiority of bullets over arrows in warfare.

For the rest of the day the three members of the Verendryean expedition stayed under the trees. When darkness fell they emerged and went forward in what they believed was the direction of the encampment where the younger La Verendrye had stayed along with all the Bows who were not warriors. Their lucky star was high and in spite of the strangeness of their surroundings it was the trio of Frenchmen who arrived earliest of the entire 2,000 at the rendezvous.

The Bow chief had hastened off to try to stop the band that had been marching nearest



himself and Pierre, but in their high terror of the Snakes they would not stay in the region to search for anyone. The next day, being further from the enemy's stamping-ground, some of the Bow riders were persuaded to circle around hunting for the white men. They went on with the search all the way to the camp. "Finally", wrote Pierre later, "the chief reached the camp, five days after us, more dead than alive from grief at not knowing what had become of us. The first bit of news he had received of us was that we had arrived luckily the evening before the bad weather had set in. Two feet of snow had fallen, accompanied by a terrible storm, the day after we reached the camp. His grief turned to joy and he did not know how to show his gratification."

For the next two weeks after the Bows had broken up their camp, the four Frenchmen travelled eastward toward their former place of abode with them. Then on the first of March the leader learned that a tribe of Little Cherry (choke-cherry) Indians were within reach and he told the Bow chief he must make the acquaintance of that tribe and then proceed to Fort La Reine where his father would be waiting in anxiety. The Bow chief was inconsolable till the Canadian promised to return to visit him, providing he would settle near a certain small river where he could be

found easily and would build a fort and raise grain. The promises were made and presents were given to the chief before the *au revours* were said.

Before turning northward again Pierre looked longingly toward the land where the Spanish settlements might be ; but he had no one to conduct him there, and as it was nearly a year since he had left Fort La Reine he pictured the uneasiness his father must be experiencing. So the little party made for a bend of the Missouri with the Little Cherry village as their next stopping-place.

Another language was learned by the traveller, this time one that he found simple. One of the Little Cherry Indians had been brought up among the Spaniards and spoke their language as easily as his own. Many questions were put to him about the Spanish colony, which he said was at least a 20 days' journey on horseback distant.

From this intelligent member of the Little Cherry tribe, La Verendrye learned there was a Frenchman living about a three days journey away who had settled there several years before. If his horses had been in fit condition he would have gone to visit his isolated countryman. As it was, he sent him a letter asking him to come to them at the Little Cherry fort where they would wait for him for ten days. They would leave on the first of April for the



Mandan village and thence for Fort La Reine. If the French settler could not visit the four of them, he was requested to send news of himself.

There is no sign of the fugitive Frenchman ever replying to the letter, which indeed he may not have received ; and the explorers could only conjecture how he came there to establish himself at so wide a distance from his countrymen.

Here upon a hilltop near the fort Pierre had his men, without the knowledge of the Indians, place in the earth on March 30 (1743) a leaden plate such as his father presented more than four years earlier to the Mandan chief. On one side of the plate were neatly engraved the name of the French King, the name of the Governor of Canada, and the name of the Explorer, with the year given as 1741. On the other side in rough and hurried engraving, seemingly done with a knife point, was the inscription, "Placed here by the Chevalier and de la Verendrye, Louis La Londette and A. Miotte, March 30, 1743". Likely the plate was brought from Quebec by the Explorer to be left in token of virgin land claimed for the French, the inscription on one side being done at leisure or by a professional in contrast to the hasty and uneven lettering done on the reverse side at the time it was placed.

The place, the visible sign that the travellers took possession of the country in the name of their sovereign, remained buried till Sunday, February 16, 1913. On that date some children of Pierre, South Dakota, were playing on a hill near the city and found the plaque, a corner of which was sticking out of the ground. The identity of this strangely inscribed piece of metal with the plaque mentioned in the La Verendrye Journal became established and it is now known as a historic treasure.

A pyramid of stones was raised by the Canadian men just over the place where the plaque had been buried. The Little Cherry tribesmen were told the cairn was in memory of the visit of the four travellers.

Before leaving the camp of the Little Cherry tribe on April 2, (1743), La Verendrye asked the chiefs to inform the isolated Frenchman if he should arrive in answer to his letter that the party of French desired him to follow them to the fort of the Mandans where they would be staying for a time. "I should like to have taken him away from among the Indians", wrote Pierre who seems indeed to have had as generous a nature as his father.

Three guides were hired from among the Little Cherry people to take the French to the Mandans, a seven weeks journey on horseback.





A large party of Prairie Sioux was met one day and the French stayed on guard all that night.

The leader had thought of staying two or three weeks with the Mandans that men and horses might rest, but found that by leaving earlier for Fort La Reine he might have the protection of travelling with a party of 100 Assiniboines who wanted to see La Verendrye; so on May 27, the four Frenchmen set forth on the last part of their long and adventurous travels. Thirty Sioux in ambush made an effort to stop their progress and a number of the Assiniboines were wounded, but the Sioux were put to flight.

Closing the Journal record of this tremendous journey from Portage La Prairie to the Rocky Mountains and back are the lines :  
“ We arrived at Fort La Reine on July 2, to the great satisfaction of my father who was very uneasy about us, as it had not been possible to send him any news since our departure ; and also to our own great satisfaction, being now past all difficulties, perils and dangers ”.

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## CHAPTER XXII

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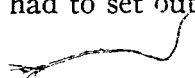
### DIFFICULTIES REACH A CLIMAX

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Sorrow turns the stars into mourners,  
and every wind of heaven into a dirge.  
—HANNAY.

“THE PRAIRIES are on fire.” This was the descriptive manner in which the savages broke the news to Pierre and his brother that all the Indian tribes were making war. The turmoil among them had been increasing in spite of all the Commandant at Fort La Reine did to try to quell it. For months he had not been able to leave his post lest the business of the forts would be ruined. In the autumn of 1742 he had wished to go to the village of the Mandans to seek news of the exploring party but had not ventured to risk the consequences that might follow if the tribal hostilities were unchecked entirely.

Difficulties were being strewn in the path of the Explorer by others besides the savages, and not many weeks after his sons got back from their eventful journey to the foot of the Rocky Mountains La Verendrye had to set out



for Quebec to settle matters with some claimants, and to make an appeal to the Government for financial assistance. This voyage eastward was to prove the Explorer's last one down the lakes and rivers of the continent.

Persistent opposition from rivals in fur-trading operations who were envious of La Verendrye's concession in the West was carried on wherever it could prove damaging. In April, 1742, the Minister at Versailles in charge of French affairs in America, the Marquis de Beauharnois, wrote to the Governor and the Intendant of Canada suggesting that an officer should be appointed to be second in command to La Verendrye, and that for paying the salary of this officer La Verendrye should be obliged to put 3,000 livres a year into the hand of Beauharnois. The injunction came a second time from France to the Marquis de Beauharnois to have this appointment made. But the Governor and the Intendant knew the injustice of such a proposal and the impossibility of La Verendrye's raising 3,000 livres to pay to an additional officer, so they made diplomatic explanations about a delay in appointing the Second. They thought it impracticable just then. Want of provision had forced La Verendrye to close Forts Dauphin and Maurepas, though the savages were displeased about this action ; besides, La Verendrye still had 50,000 livres of debts to pay and there were

many risks to take on his year's returns. "For these reasons", ran the Beauharnois-Hocquart letter to Versailles, "we are not insisting on assessing him 3,000 livres; all the more because the ~~Sieur de~~ la Verendrye has applied to be relieved in 1744 on account of ill-health, and there will be time enough to choose an officer capable of replacing him and to arrange for one of his sons—both of whom must have acquired special knowledge of those places—serving under that officer".

Before La Verendrye left Fort La Reine on his last trip from the West to the St Lawrence he had the pleasure of welcoming to the prairie trading-post Father Coquart, the Jesuit priest who accompanied him as far as Michillimakinac in the summer of 1741. In writing from Fort La Reine to the Superior of the Jesuits La Verendrye said: "Resuming the thread of my narrative from which I have wandered through vexation at the continual slanders put upon me,—I left Montreal with Father Coquart who had been given to me as my missionary. During our unavoidable stay at Fort Michillimakinac, as a result of jealousy Father Coquart was prevented from coming on with me, much to the regret of our whole party and of myself in particular. But through the urgent requests of the Governor of Canada he is with us now, to the immense satisfaction of all here".

Hearing of the thousands of pagans the Chevalier and his brother had found nearer the Rocky Mountains, Father Coquart expressed a desire to proceed further west to carry civilizing influences to the most remote Indian nations. But when La Verendrye was no longer in the West Father Coquart found his work hampered in many ways and in the spring of 1744 he decided to go to Montreal to discuss affairs with the head of his Order and ask for assistance in the work of evangelization. Father Coquart was the first priest to celebrate mass at any point west of the Lake of the Woods. His death took place at Chicoutimi. His remains were taken later to the cemetery at Tadousac.

Upon La Verendrye's arrival in Montreal in the autumn of 1743 he found it more than ever difficult to rend the tissue of slander woven by the intriguers who envied him his concession and the glory of his explorations. A lifetime of hardships and the exceedingly severe illness he suffered after his midwinter trip to the Mandans ; and, more than these, hope endlessly long delayed and ungenerous treatment from those who should have helped him bear the cost and dangers of his explorations,—all had combined to rob the Explorer, now 58 years of age, of his resilience of spirit. Despairing of securing funds in the face of the relentless opposition he was meeting, La Verendrye handed in his resignation.

## CHAPTER XXIII

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### THE VOYAGEUR SHOWERED WITH HONORS JUST BEFORE SETTING OUT ON THE TIDELESS SEA

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Come to us, ye who live among strangers in the houses of dismay and self-righteousness. Poor, awkward ones ! How bewildered and bedevilled ye go . . . Leave the plough and the cart for a little time ; put aside the needle and the awl. Is leather thy brother, O man ? Come away ! Come away ! from the loom and the desk, from the shop where the carcasses are hung, and the place where raiment is sold and the place where it is sewn in the darkness. O, bad treachery ! Is it for joy that you sit in the broker's den, thou pale man ? Has the attorney enchanted thee ? Come away, for the dance has begun lightly, the wind is sounding over the hills, the sun laughs in the valley, and the sea leaps upon the shingle panting for joy, dancing, dancing, dancing for joy.

—JAMES STEPHENS,  
The Crock of Gold.

**H**AD THE SCENES of the explorations of La Verendrye and his sons and of their trading-posts not been so many hundreds of miles remote from Quebec and had the ocean journey from the Canadian to the French

capital not been so hazardous for the slenderly-built sailing-vessels the fabric of lies about the Explorer spending more thought upon building up a thriving fur-trade than upon discovering a way to the Sea would have been reduced to shreds more readily.

As it was, six years passed before the French Court became fully aware of the magnificence of what had been accomplished by the great French-Canadian, his nephew and his four sons, and of the fidelity with which the Explorer had labored to transfix as reality the splendor of his dream. Then the full tide of public and royal approbation came in with a rush though it proved to have turned too late to carry him to the long-sought western rim of the world.

One of the Beauharnois-Hocquart letters written from Quebec to Versailles in October, 1744, announces : " The Sieur de la Verendrye having asked to be relieved, the Marquis de Beauharnois has replaced him by the Sieur de Noyelles who is the most suitable person both for negotiating with the savages of the place and for keeping them at peace with the Sioux and getting them to trouble the English ".

Since the Governor of Canada was in a position to know how thoroughly disinterested were the services of La Verendrye on behalf of his Sovereign and his Country and how completely irreproachable was his life, a letter

written by the Governor about the Explorer on October 27, 1744, to the Minister at Paris in charge of affairs in Canada helps one decide in what estimation the Discover of the North-West should be held :

“ Although the Sieur de la Verendrye has not yet reached the goal he proposed to himself, it does not appear, Monseigneur, that he neglected anything or came short in the diligence which it was his duty to exercise. He ventures to hope you will see the matter in this light if you will have the goodness to take into consideration the opposition he had to surmount, partly, in gaining the friendship of natives to whose territories no one had ever penetrated ; and partly, in managing to make use of them, as it was indispensable to do, in obtaining the help and information needful for such an enterprise.

“ That officer, Monseigneur, appeared to me to be profoundly mortified at the efforts made in certain quarters to asperse the purity of his sentiments in connection with the prosecution of this discovery. . . I cannot refuse to him the testimony which seems to be his due, namely, that in this exploration he has benefitted the colony and not himself by the number of establishments he has made in places to which no one had penetrated previously, establishments that produce today a quantity of beaver and other furs of which the



English were getting the advantage,—and this without causing any expense to His Majesty.

“The idea that has been formed of the wealth he has amassed in those places is disproven flatly by his actual condition of indigence. Without undue complaisance or predilection for him, I may say the twelve years he has passed in those posts yielded him barely 4,000 livres, which is all he has to hope will remain over after he has paid the debts he contracted for that enterprise; and finally, Monseigneur, that the situation in which he has placed matters appears to me to justify the bestowal of your favors on him.

“In the hope I entertain that you will see fit to reward his services, I beg you, Monseigneur, to give him appreciable marks of your favor by procuring his advancement on the first occasion and also his seniority over those who have this year been appointed to vacant companies. *I do not know of a single respect in which he has merited the mortification he has suffered in not being advanced,* and I will attribute it solely to oversight of the recommendation I have had the honor of making to you of *the Sieur de la Verendrye as the senior lieutenant and the man who appeared to me to be the most worthy of the graces of the King.*

“In reality, Monseigneur, six years of service in France, 32 in this Colony without

*reproach*, (at least, I am not aware of any) and nine wounds on the body were reasons which made it impossible for me to hesitate in proposing him to you to fill one of the vacant companies. If I have had reason to flatter myself, Monseigneur, that you were persuaded I would admit to my lists the names of such officers only as were capable of service and deserving of your kindness, it was particularly in connection with the favorable attention I relied on your giving to the case of the *Sieur de la Verendrye*."

A letter signed "*Varennés de la Verendrye*" was written that same autumn to the French Minister of the Navy. Along with it was sent a concise sketch of what had been accomplished during the dozen years of exploration carried on in the West as being the most eloquent argument in proof of the writer's devotion to his Country. Though the Western Sea had not been reached, *La Verendrye* asked the Minister to take into consideration "the accidents I could not prevent and the opposition I could not overcome". He said he was poorer than before he began his explorations and his long years of effort "to create establishments in places where no person before myself had penetrated, which will enlarge the trade of the Colony, even if no one fully succeeds in

discovering the Western Sea, and for which I have not involved His Majesty in any expense”.

The Sieur de Noyelles, La Verendrye's successor as concessionaire in the North-West and commander of the exploration for the discovery of the Western Sea, did not find life on the frontiers in any degree blissful. Before two years had passed “the most suitable person for negotiating with the savages and keeping them at peace with the Sioux” asked to be relieved of the duties of his position in the West. No one demurred against accepting his resignation.

With feelings akin to glee one peruses a letter written by the Marquis de Beauharnois on October 15, 1746, to the Court at Versailles informing its members that he was going to send the Sieur de la Verendrye to the West to replace the Sieur de Noelles. “I will undertake to state, Monseigneur”, he writes, addressing the Minister of the Navy, “he is better qualified than anyone else to carry on this exploration ; he has a better understanding of the savages through living among them fourteen years. He is mild and firm and better fitted to draw from them the information necessary for the progress of *the discovery which has been at a standstill for two years in the hands of the Sieur de Noyelles.* In the course of the same letter, the Minister was

assured that no blame could be attached to La Verendrye for more progress not being made in the West when he was Commander of the expedition. He had given himself wholly to the task and had devoted to it all the proceeds of the new forts that he established with infinite trouble and care and at extreme risk.

The charm of La Verendrye's personality is felt in the subdued and modest tone of his first letter to the Minister of the Navy after he has learned that the Governor desires him to resume his explorations. Jubilant pride invests the missive, but there occurs not a word of disparagement of the officer who had left the expedition at a standstill. The letter dated at Quebec, Nov. 1, 1746, runs : " The Marquis de Beauharnois has done me the honor to notify me in advance of his intention that I should continue the search for the Western Sea in the place of Monsieur de Noyelles who has applied to be relieved. I shall make, I assure you Monseigneur, the utmost effort to respond to the confidence he is good enough to repose in me. The knowledge I have of that region, joined to that which my sons have acquired, will enable me to make further discoveries of a still more satisfactory character ; at least, it will not be my fault if I do not. I beg you, Monseigneur, to be convinced of the attention I shall give to the matter having much more at heart the success of the enterprise than my own



personal interest. The latter I shall always be ready to sacrifice to the service of the King."

Whether the appointment made by the Governor was cancelled by the Minister of the Navy, or whether the matter of financing a new expedition stood in the way, or it might have been that the insensate warfare among the Indian tribes was a deciding factor,—at all events La Verendrye, meteoric in action where his splendid purpose was concerned, did not spend the summer of 1747 on the waterways leading towards the West, nor the next summer, nor yet the next.

Great need of haste existed if the French-Canadian Explorer was to win the fame of finding the Pacific. In 1719 an English expedition was sent to America to find a north-west passage; again in 1722 an expedition came from the island-home of many a navigator, but it proved a failure. Twenty years later the British Government despatched a naval expedition and the ships reached and crossed the Hudson's Bay and wintered in the Churchill River, but yet they were far from the Western Sea.

More and more urgent grew the desire to find the path "from Europe to furthestmost Ind", and a company of English business-men fitted out a small fleet with a capital of \$50,000 behind it and experienced sea-men in charge. At this time the Government of England

offered a reward of \$100,000 for whoever discovered the long-desired route. On May 31, 1746, the English vessels started out from Warmouth Roads along with four of the Hudson's Bay Company's ships on the search. They were absent over a year, returning unsuccessful on October 14, 1747. Not even the lure of the immense sum offered was powerful enough to induce them to stay longer on the drifts of the desolate main.

About this time the regime of the Marquis de Beauharnois closed and the administration of affairs in Canada devolved upon the Count de la Galissioniere for two or three years. The King's new representative seems to have been a man of La Verendrye's own stamp in so far as having directness of purpose and determination to accomplish his ends. His forthright **courage** shows itself in a letter he wrote to Versailles on October 23, 1747: "I would only say it appears to me that what has been reported to you with reference to the Sieur de la Verendrye is entirely false, and moreover that any officers who may be employed on that task, western exploration, will be under the necessity of giving a part of their attention to commerce as long as the king does not furnish them with other means of subsistence. The system may not be good, but it is a poor way to encourage the explorers to reproach them with any slight profits they may make, or to

delay their promotion under this pretext as the Sieur de la Verendrye says has been done in his case. *These explorations cause heavy expense and fatigues, and greater dangers than regular wars.. The Sieur de la Salle and the son of the Sieur de la Verendrye and so many others who have perished in these adventures furnish the proof of what I say. I will only add that as regards the Sieur de la Verendrye I agree entirely with what the Marquis de Beauharnois wrote on October 1746*".

This letter of vigorous import was followed up in the summer of 1749 by the Count de la Galissioniere himself appearing at the French Court. Here he raised his voice effectively on behalf of the valorous Explorer who too long had received the treatment of the commonest coureur du bois. When the eyes of the statesmen were opened and they saw of what mettle the Discoverer of the West was made, the King and his Ministers were swift to end the wrongs he had borne without bitterness. Such reparation as lay in their power was made. On September 17, 1749, Pierre Gaultier de Varcennes, Sieur de la Verendrye became a Captain of Marines and a Chevalier of the Military Order of St Louis, and instantly the Count de la Galissioniere chose him as captain of his Guards. Still more to the point, he was commissioned to take charge of a new expedition to the North-West. To have an untrammelled

chance of proceeding with his search for the Western Sea meant to him a thousand times more than decorations and titles and the prospect of being off on his explorations again under happier auspices aroused him to enthusiastic activity such as engaged him in the months prior to his voyage westward in 1731.

La Verendrye's last letter to the Minister of the Navy and Minister in Charge of the French Colonies in North America, written in the autumn of 1749, shows how completely he immersed himself in preparations for proceeding with his enterprise : " Monseigneur, I take ~~the liberty of returning you my very humble~~ thanks that you have been pleased to procure for me from His Majesty a Cross of Saint Louis and promotion for two of my sons. My zeal accompanied by gratitude impels me to leave here next spring honored with the orders of Monsieur le Marquis de la Jonquiere, our General, to pursue the establishment of forts and the making of further discoveries in the West after an interruption of several years. I have delivered to the Marquis de la Jonquiere a map and a memorandum showing the route I am to follow for the present. The Count de la Galissioniere has a similar one. I shall keep an exact Journal of my travels from my first advance into the interior to the farthest point my sons and I may reach. I am not able to leave Montreal till next May which is

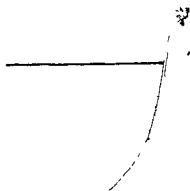


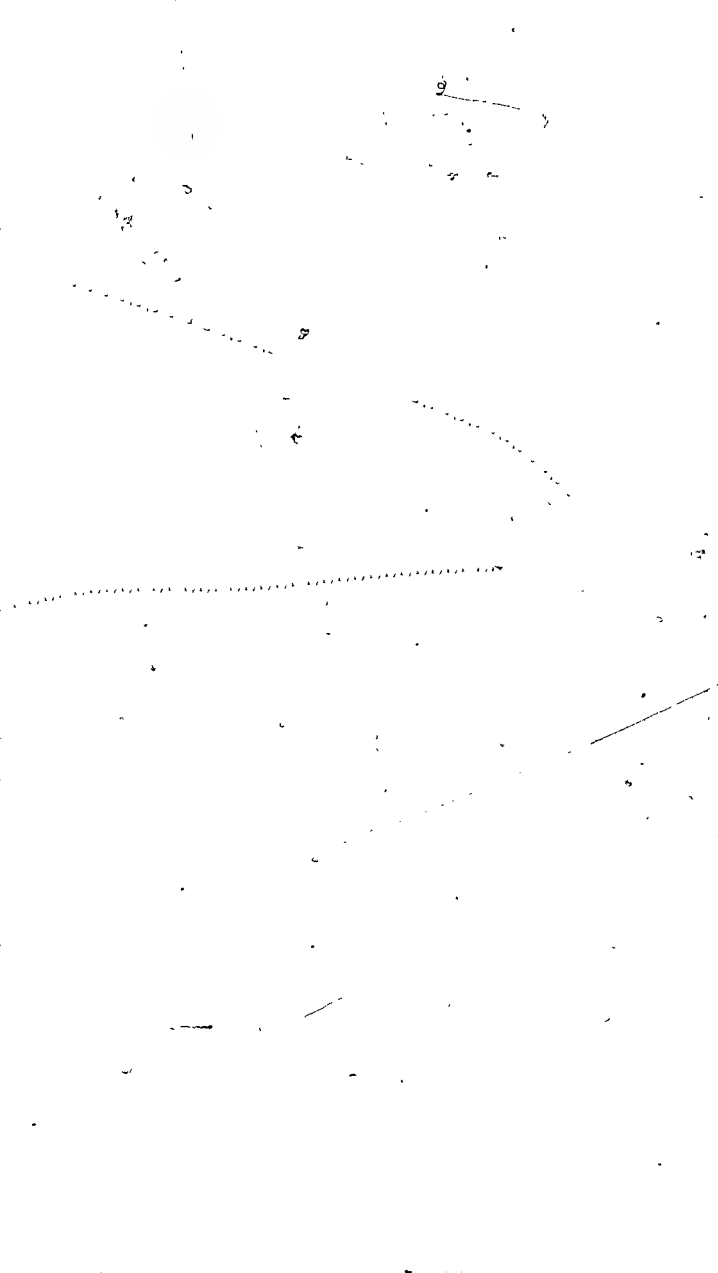
the time navigation opens for the Upper Country. I mean to use all diligence that I may be able to winter at Fort Bourbon, on the lower course of the Riviere aux Biches, the last fort I established. I shall be only too happy if after all the troubles, fatigue and dangers I have gone through in this long period of exploration I may succeed in establishing my disinterestedness and the ardent desires of my sons and myself for the glory of the King and the welfare of the Colony. I am, with very profound respect, Monseigneur, your humble and obedient servant, La Verendrye."

Freshness and youthfulness of spirit descended once more upon La Verendrye. The knowledge that his motives were no longer questioned by those who had the power to help him achieve his splendid purpose was a restorative for mind and heart. The fires of his ambition glowed with steadier, intenser flame than in earlier years. All the wisdom gained from former expeditions was brought to bear upon the preparations made for the new voyage up through the northern lakes and into the River Saskatchewan far beyond the Junction of the North and South branches, to which point some of his men had explored a while earlier. He explained to the Governor of Canada that one summer would be spent in

reaching Fort Bourbon and another summer in making the heights from which the Saswatchewan flowed. The precautions he would take that his men should not be in danger of perishing during the winters in the unexplored western wildernesses were outlined. The autumn weeks of 1749 were the gladdest. La Verendrye knew since his childhood days in Three Rivers.

But the years of hard journeyings, financial burdens, and deferred hopes had worn out the body though they had not been able to touch the brave spirit of the Explorer. At Montreal on December 6, 1749, death carried Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, Sieur de la Verendrye, out upon the tideless Sea, and for half a century no white man approached more nearly to the Western Sea than had been done by this illustrious French-Canadian and his sons.





## CHAPTER XXIV

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### THE VERENDRYEAN ENTERPRISES END

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It was an alien race who used the inimitable French voyageur to follow in the footsteps of La Verendrye and his sons and push their trade and exploration to the Western Sea. But that same race which was alien to the French is now united with them to form the Canadian people. Both races are trying to form one Canadian nationality with a distinctive and worthy character; they can unite without reserve in admiring the patriotism, courage, tenacity, optimism, disinterestedness, love of peace, achievement against great odds, of La Verendrye, to whom they owe so much. From him, too, both can learn that nothing is gained by harboring and cultivating a sense of wrong, but rather that the future affords an opportunity to vindicate the past.

—D. C. HARVEY.

**P**IERRE LA VERENDRYE WAS at Fort Michillimakinac and François at one of the western forts when news of their father's death reached them. They went east as soon as travelling was possible. From that time neither they nor Louis-Joseph were ever again in the West.

At the time La Verendrye went to Quebec from Fort La Reine (Portage La Prairie) in the summer of 1743 his three sons were pushing still their explorations. Their connection with the venture did not terminate suddenly with his departure nor until the time of his death and the appointing of a new commander.

While the Explorer was still in the West his sons had paddled from waterway to waterway far to the north of the earlier chain of trading-posts. They discovered the Swan River and the Red Deer and built Forts Dauphin and Bourbon, then journeyed on up to the Saskatchewan (the Poskoyac, it was called) 75 miles beyond the first Fort Bourbon (on the Riviere aux Biches). They learned always more of the Saskatchewan and of the Nelson, that part of the Saskatchewan that lies between Lake Winnipeg and the Hudson's Bay.

But the fur-trade at the western forts and the explorations were carried on irregularly during the five years following La Verendrye's resignation from the command. His sons were commissioned much of the time for military duty in the east.

In the summer of 1748 Pierre and François were sent to the West on business connected with the forts. They re-built Fort Maurepas (on Lake Winnipeg at the mouth of

Winnipeg River) which the Indians had burned down and went on to Fort La Reine to repair the establishment there. Turning northward they went up the lakes beyond the first Fort Bourbon, abandoned at this time, and on to the region where the River Saskatchewan widens out forming Cedar Lake, or Bourbon Lake as it was then. Here they built a new fort and named it Fort Bourbon after the abandoned one. The ruins of the second Fort Bourbon have been found and may still be seen. In the same year, 1748, these gallant explorers went on up the Saskatchewan to the point where the Pasquia enters it, (where The Pas has since grown up), and here they erected a fort which they named Le Pas, in memory of their mother whose death was in 1739 and who was a daughter of the Sieur de l'Ile du Pas. It was at l'Ile du Pas near Three Rivers that La Verendrye and his wife lived during the first twelve years of their married life. Still further on up through the wildernesses the brothers travelled till they reached the junction of the North and the South Rivers, a few miles east of the present city of Prince Albert. Not far below the forks of the river they erected the last trading-post it was their destiny to build, a shelter where quite other explorers were to find lodging in the course of travels over the Canadian prairies. Under the military commander, the Chevalier de la Corne, Pierre de

la Verendrye had been serving for a year or two in the East and they named the new post Fort a la Corne.

These preparations were made in anticipation of the commencement of a more glorious and successful voyage than any yet made by La Verendrye and his sons. After the Explorer had received the knighthood of St Louis and the still more highly prized commission to start anew on his explorations he decided that the wisest course to take was to spend a summer travelling from Montreal to Fort Bourbon (at the mouth of the Saskatchewan, on Cedar Lake, or Bourbon Lake), winter there, and secure guides at that point, which could be done easily, to proceed with him across the prairie up the river towards the heights.

The forks of the Saskatchewan formed the rendezvous every spring of the Crees of the mountains, the prairies and the rivers, and here they deliberated as to whether they should proceed to the Bay to trade with the English as of old or cross Lake Manitoba or Lake Winnipeg to exchange goods with the French. Pierre had met the Indians there at the forks one spring and asked them (remembering his father's confirmed custom) about the source of this broad river. He made the entry in his journal : " They all replied with one voice that it came from very far, from a height of land where there were lofty mountains ; that they

knew of a great lake on the other side of the mountains the water of which was undrinkable”.

The description made it seem well to plan on spending the second summer going upstream to this far height of land and establishing a fort near the mountains. From this fort they could supply the savages with their necessities and it would serve, too, as a base from which to explore over the mountain roof of the world for the lake of the undrinkable water on the other side. La Verendrye felt assured that such a trip would not go unrewarded and he regretted not having knowledge earlier of the River Saskatchewan. He made it clear to the Governor that news from him could not reach Quebec till the third year after he left Montreal. To one of his sons, who already had learned seven Indian languages, the feature that appealed was the fact of having only one nation with which to deal along the whole magnificent stretch of the river, so far from the case when trying to reach the Ocean by way of the Missouri River.

Returning from the River Saskatchewan to Michillimakinac, Pierre learned that the death of his father had taken place in December, 1749. He and his brothers, the men who knew better than anyone else ever could know how supremely valiant was the Discoverer of the West, sorrowed keenly.



The Marquis de la Jonquiere was the successor of the Marquis de Beauharnois after a two years interval during which time the Count de la Galissioniere administered the affairs of Canada. The new Governor appointed Captain le Gardeur de St Pierre commander of the expedition for the discovery of the Western Sea, succeeding La Verendrye. St Pierre went to Fort La Reine in 1751 and sent his lieutenant, Niverville, on ahead. The lieutenant commissioned ten of his men to make a voyage to the far West and they built Fort La Jonquiere at the foot of the Rockies on the South Saskatchewan River.

The new commander did not engage the sons of the Explorer to share his adventures, a fact that appeared to them as unjust as it was unaccountable. They presented their case to the Governor of Canada and to the Minister of the Navy. They depicted the reasonableness of their expectations that they would have still an interest in the business of the string of forts they had helped build at such cost and danger and which only then were beginning to bring in a profit. Their father's expenditure on equipment for the expedition he planned should leave Montreal in the spring of 1750 meant an increase in their heavy burden of debt if they were not to be appointed members

of the expedition under Captain le Gardeur de St Pierre as otherwise the goods would be a complete loss.

Pierre, François and Louis-Joseph sought positions with the expedition on the strength of their intimate knowledge of the conditions under which exploration in the West could be carried on and the value their services should have as men experienced in dealing with the savages. Pierre urged also the fact that he had been in the service of the King of France more than twenty years without having obtained promotion. He attached to his letter a summary of his movements under orders from the year 1728 when he joined the troops as a soldier cadet and did garrison duty for two years in Montreal before being detached by the Marquis de Beauharnois to go with his father to make discoveries in the West.

A letter written by François La Verendrye asked for consideration of the situation of himself and his brothers who with their father had bent all their energies towards making themselves competent frontiersmen, only to find now that the new Commandant had sought elsewhere his associates for the venture. François appealed to the Minister in charge of Canadian affairs to have regard for what his father had accomplished and the importance of the discovery he would have been able to make "if only he had had a little more help



and if he had not been thwarted so much by envy". In the poignancy of his grief over the death of his father and the darkening down of the future for Pierre, Louis-Joseph and himself, François made a touching reference to their brother Jean who had met his death on Massacre Island while bravely serving the enterprise, and he went so far as to say ~~that Jean's fate was scarcely more tragic than~~ that of the brothers who survived but who with the death of La Verendrye had watched the collapse of all their prospects.

But no provision was made for the sons of the gallant Explorer resuming their experiences among the hawk-faced Crees and Saulteux and the other tribes of whose mentalities they possessed unrivalled knowledge.

The French regime in Canada was shortly to end and with the English in command at Quebec the officers directing explorations on the western part of the continent were no longer French-Canadians.

Pierre, the oldest son of the Explorer, rejoined the marine troops. In the summer of 1751 he was at aux Cedres, near Montreal; in 1752 he was sent to Fort Beausejour, in Acadia, where he remained attached to the garrison of the fort till it was taken by Moncton in June, 1755. His death took place at Quebec, Sept. 13, 1755. He was buried in the Notre-Dame de Quebec Cemetery.

François and Louis-Joseph seem to have kept up a connection with the West. Among the records of mail received in the West in 1755 occurs the name of a Monsieur de la Verendrye, commandant at Chagouanigon, on Lake Superior. It is thought that this was François.

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As for Louis-Joseph, The Chevalier de la Verendrye, the youngest of the four brothers, he married at Montreal, Nov. 7, 1755, Marie-Amable Testard de Montigny. A daughter, Amable-Charlotte Gauthier de la Verendrye, was born and was baptized in Montreal, Nov. 7, 1756. Three weeks later Madame de la Verendrye died and it is believed her little daughter followed her to the grave though no record of the child's death has been found. Louis-Joseph was in Montreal in the spring of 1757 engaging canoe-men for a voyage to the West. In the summer of 1757 he was named a lieutenant in the marines. He married a second time at Laprairie, Jan. 31, 1738. Louise-Antoine Mezieres de l'Épervanche was the woman whose fortunes were linked now with his. In the marriage contract he is named a lieutenant of infantry and is spoken of as living with the garrison at Montreal. François Gaultier, sieur de la Verendrye, assisted at the Chevalier's wedding. After the English won possession of New France Louis-Joseph and his wife continued to reside in Montreal till

1761. In the autumn of that year the Chevalier planned to make a trip to France and with 120 other members of the French nobility was a passenger on the ship the *Auguste*. He was one of 114 persons who perished in the shipwreck caused by a great storm on the afternoon of November 15 off the shore of Cape Breton. The widow of Louis-Joseph died on March 3, 1824, at the age of 88 years.

Marie-Anne and Marie-Catherine, the daughters of the Explorer and Marie-Anne Dandonneau, married brothers, Hippolite and Jean Leber. All four, together with the two sons of Jean Leber and Marie-Catherine, (Jacques, 15 years old, and Louis-Joseph, 13 years old), perished in the shipwreck of the *Auguste* along with the Chevalier.

François, the only surviving son of the Explorer, inherited the possessions of his brother, among them the seigneurie of Tremblay, and from that time assumed the title *Sieur du Tremblay*. On Nov. 9, 1769, by an act of agreement François gave to Dame Louise-Antoine Mezieres de l'Épervanche, widow of the Chevalier (Louis-Joseph), his rights in his brother's estate. François died at the Hotel-Dieu, Montreal, July 31, 1794, at 82 years of age. He had not married and with his death the family name de la Verendrye became extinct.

## CHAPTER XXV

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### AN APPRAISAL OF CANADA'S OWN GENTLEMAN OF FORTUNE

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"Earth smiles Death's triumph down again".

"**L**A VERENDRYE'S WAS THE GENIUS of successful achievement" it has been stated. A glance over what was performed in the space of little more than a dozen years by this great Trifluvien, assisted by his four sons and his nephew, the first white men who wedged their way into the West, leaves one no alternative but to admit the power of La Verendrye's genius and his right to immortality. While making appraisal of the success of the most courageous adventurers of their day it is but just to keep in remembrance the fact that they were men of small personal fortune and yet neither France nor Canada paid a dollar towards the entire cost of their series of explorations.

A Giants' Causeway in earnest was made by the establishments La Verendrye erected, requiring but one more to be built to complete the chain of forts stretching from the Great Lakes to the Rocky Mountains. Pass in review these forts, substantial symbols of the

civilization carried by the French-Canadian and his little company among the barbarians of unknown and forbidding hinterland regions : Fort St Pierre, on Rainy Lake ; Fort St Charles, on the island-studded Lake of the Woods ; Fort Maurepas, at the mouth of the Winnipeg River ; Fort Rouge, where Winnipeg City now stands ; ~~Fort aux Roseaux~~, up the Red River a distance ; Fort La Reine, on the Assiniboine where Portage La Prairie has arisen ; the small fort at the junction of the Souris and Assiniboine ; Fort Dauphin, on the north-west shore of Lake Manitoba ; the first Fort Bourbon, at the mouth of the Riviere aux Biches ; the second Fort Bourbon, at the mouth of the Saskatchewan River (Cedar Lake) ; Fort Le Pas, on the Saskatchewan River where now stands The Pas ; and Fort La Corne, just below the forks of the North and the South Saskatchewan. With the exception of three all were in flourishing condition at the time La Verendrye left the West. They were all at strategic points for fur-trading thanks to La Verendrye's wisdom arising out of countless conversations with Indian canoe-men. The establishments that were built under his direction were placed so satisfactorily that for a hundred years to come the forts built in that part of Canada by the Hudson's Bay Company and the North-West Company were close to the sites he selected.

From the ~~Lake~~ of the Woods across all Manitoba south of Norway House and The Pas and into Saskatchewan west to the Indian rendezvous at the junction of the pair of thousand-mile river-branches,—this was part of the boundary of the region explored by the La Verendrye voyageurs. From Lake Winnipeg up the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, across to the Mouse River (the Souris), through North and South Dakota, for hundreds of miles along the Missouri, the second great river of their discovering, and into Wyoming till the pinnacled outline of mountain-tops can be seen,—this suggests other borders of the virgin wastes over which they carried the fleur-de-lis of France and the Canada of their day the while they were enduring perpetual dangers and earning immortal fame. The new land, till then unvisited and uncharted—unvisited and uncharted in their absolute, literal meanings and not in a qualified, figurative sense—which they added to the possessions of the French Sovereign was as extensive as all the country explored in the 240 years that intervened between the visit of Columbus to the continent and the time they entered the West. Recollection of the slenderness of their resources and the necessity of establishing an entente cordiale with the primitive races accentuates the splendor of their performance. A country vaster than all France was discovered and



explored by the Adventurer and his sons, a lustrous achievement, the more lustrous in view of their having been inexpressibly hampered by the lack of money.

While pushing his explorations hard and far in the intensity of his ambition to win for France and Canada the honor of the discovery of the Pacific La Verendrye did not dismiss lightly the duty he owed to the savage races who promised allegiance to himself and the Governor and King. The whole absorbing story of the Discoverer of the West and his sons is invested with power to amaze by the fact that from the time they turned their faces westward from Three Rivers till the Rocky Mountains had been sighted they caused no drop of blood to be shed. Whatever lives their explorations cost were willingly given in the conducting of the great emprise. The Verendryes climbed to eminence but not over men's graves.

Time after time La Verendrye's projects were bedevilled by the inter-tribal warring of the Red men. Their violated promises would have left a less patient leader distraught. Plentiful as black-berries were the counts against the barbarically-painted braves. But La Verendrye knew all the queer strains in their mentality and it was not a trait of his to nurse resentment even against his countrymen and equals in intellect who wronged him. As an instance of the kindness of the relationships

he established between the French and the Indians who aided his purposes may be mentioned the attitude of the Assiniboines who escorted the Explorer to the Mandan villages. As the Assiniboines were returning to their lodges they said to the Mandans : " We are leaving you our Father ; take great care of him and of all the French. They have wisdom. They know how to do everything. We love our Father ; we also fear him. Do as we do."

That La Verendrye was fitted by temperament to have command of the important undertaking was proven conclusively by the consideration with which he treated the Indians and the efforts he made to teach them how to protect themselves from danger of starvation during the inexorable winters. That he had a care for their spiritual interests, too, cannot be doubted in the face of the pains he took to have a missionary member of his expedition as much of the time as possible.

Regard for the men working with him was one of the fine characteristics of the Discoverer of the West. His sons knew no other delight than to be associated with him in the enterprise and though he gave them room to develop initiative and powers of resourcefulness they chose to surround him and lend his project all their support. Whether Fortune smiled or frowned La Verendrye remained companionably close to the others of his kind. At every



turn he consulted with his men, relying on their experience having as much practical value as his. Knowing how to encourage others to contribute their knowledge of the intricacies of exploration was one source of his unfailing generalship. Profound interest in the project and faith in the commander was needed to keep a party of men together in gay defiant manner meeting dangers in lonely wildernesses when there was little to hope for in the way of wealth and nothing in the way of advancement. La Verendrye's consideration for his men and his habit of accepting the severest tasks and most dangerous positions himself won their faithfulness to him and to the venture that captured their imaginations through its hold on his spirit.

A man of kindness and all generous instincts, tolerant of frailties in others, La Verendrye wasted no time nor thought on self-pity. "He, too, had tears for all souls in trouble. Here and in hell",—but none for himself. One of the bravest records Canada possesses is La Verendrye's account of the massacre of his son and his party in 1736, given in his memorial to the Minister of Marine. "I had", he says, "many people in Fort St Charles and no provisions. This determined me to send in haste three canoes to bring us assistance and some goods. Father Aulneau immediately resolved to go to Michillimakinac.

He asked me for my eldest son as he hoped the journey would be speedier under him. I could not possibly oppose him, he being absolutely resolved. They embarked on June 8 and were all massacred by the Sioux at seven leagues from our fort, by the greatest of all treasons. *I lost my son, the Reverend Father, and all my Frenchmen ; I shall sorrow for them all my life*". The vigor, feeling and heart-breaking simplicity of these lines constitute them one of the emeralds of Canadian literature.

In the same uncomplaining fashion La Verendrye accepted all his rough and tumble experiences with Life. Misfortunes were taken as matters of course by him as by all the company of

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"Men with empires in their purpose  
And new eras in their brain".

Now that La Verendrye's Mer de l'Ouest has been found long ago and no delays of any sort have power to be vexatious to his ardent spirit in fancy one hears him laughing over the absurdity solemnly committed by the unimaginative government officials who took the precaution of providing for a system of surveillance over the Discoverer's movements lest he should spend his energies upon fur-trading to the neglect of the search for the way to the Ocean. Huckstering was never his metier : the dream of his life was to find the Western Sea for the glory of France and Canada. To suspect that he needed any outside force to

preserve his fidelity towards his undertaking was arrant foolishness. No passionate lover requires a watch lest he be inattentive to his innamorata. That La Verendrye acquiesced, unprotesting, to the arrangement indicated how completely his purpose swayed his mind, leaving little thought to spend on misrepresentation and trumped-up charges.

“From the mouth of the St Lawrence to the mouth of the Fraser stretches a tradition of glorious pioneer heroism, noble enough to sanctify the nationalism of any people”, a writer declares. Much of this bright tradition centres about the years and the person of the Explorer who was the spearhead of all the gallant pioneers of the Canadian North-West.

The narrator of La Verendrye's life and adventure requires skill to depict the rare satisfaction known to those engaged in pursuits drawing constantly upon all the faculties. There is something tremendously sweeping even in a grey leisurely story of the Discoverer's years. But beauty was a more constant element of his environment than barbarity. The portrayal gains much in lifelikeness when the writer tells of his joyous as well as his sombre experiences.

La Verendrye had a depth of interest in the continent not possible to one transplanted here. His earliest roots felt their way through Canadian soil and it enhances the regard in

which his memory is held by his countrymen to know that his spirit was drenched with gladness by the beauty of the scenes of his homeland. One believes the great Voyageur's soul is in Canada's evenshine to this day through it is many years since his body was laid in the church of Notre Dame in Montreal.

Who like this vehement Voyageur had such a chance to watch "spring-time and summer and red autumn pass", and what mattered the lack of the royal imprimatur for his project on glorious days spent in a canoe riding down the rivers on the back of swift, strong currents? Which of the aristocrat-courtiers among his ancestors ever had such large demands made upon his gifts of finesse in a day as the Explorer? For fulness of life none of the august arbitrators at Versailles could compare their existence with the days he spent pushing the frontiers back across the continent.

La Verendrye was familiar with Nature in all her moods and at all seasons. He had been long in the open in springtime when the budding leaves were a pale green rain in the air and song-birds made the woods vocal with their showers of melody. He knew summer's golden languors from spending many weeks in sunlight spilled lavishly on lakes and rivers under the blazing blue. Star-lit skies he had often watched from the well-built forest bed where he lay breathing in resinous aromas.

Throughout the long, still autumn day when birds were flying south many a time he had paddled on sapphire lakes envying the winged travellers since they knew where lay the shores of their desire. Winter in the western forts had its discomforts but at the worst these were less insupportable than ills bred in southern malarial swamps. He knew the wholesomeness of a prairie day with the quicksilver at thirty below of which a later pioneer wrote : " On such a day biliousness is a thing disproved and dyspepsia dies like a thing unclean ; a snow wind going at 80 miles an hour would give a Death's-head a complexion and make a delicate appetite regard sheet-iron beefsteak as sweet-bread."

Long evenings by the camp-fire offered leisure for recalling the buds of flame softly unfolding at summer dawns, the subtle spell cast by the season of the ripening of blueberries, the freshness of moss-covered boulders and wet wooded terraces, the wonder of " that silver shell we call the moon " as it had floated over deep black forests. La Verendrye had felt the healing power of clouds, sunshine, dewfall, pulsating stars, the beauty of crisp October days and of lustrous glancing Northern Lights. A hundred enchantments were possessed by the life of a gentleman of fortune for one of cultivated mind as well as for the sheerly sensuous, and the wild panoramic

beauty of the seasons in the North helped bind La Verendrye's spirit to the long enterprise that led him through illimitable solitudes.

Nothing melancholy is revealed in La Verendrye's nature and nothing blameworthy in his life. A curtain need be drawn over no action of the Discoverer of the West. His nobility of nature endured every test. Though it was not his fortune to realize the fulfilment of the bright dream, though he never reached "the land of singing waters by the shores of the Pacific", not by one gleam does the incompleteness of his achievement lessen its splendor. When this man of destiny set for himself the task of finding the Unknown Sea he could not foretell that he would require to raise funds for paying the expenses of his own little brigade of boatmen, the expenses of equipment for his forts, (the stepping-stones over gigantic distances towards the Sea), and the cost of thousands of presents needed to win over the affections of the savages. Nor could he prevision that beyond the thousand miles of forest lay a thousand miles of prairie and then a thousand miles of mountain wilderness before the margin of the Sea was reached.

Canada as a Dominion from ocean to ocean was foreseen by La Verendrye and with joyous wantonness and with utter unawareness of his own significance he spent himself in the effort to find a continental roadway. "What



advantages may result from my toils the future will tell". From these words it is clear he had a glimmering perception of the wonder and wealth of the lands of his discovery, but he was content to allow the revelation to be made by others. What he wanted for himself was the delight of making explorations with more adequate facilities than were granted to him. One's emotions are ravished by his disarming manner of turning the blind eye of his intellect toward the Fates when they signalled him that his own safety demanded his dropping the project. It is soul-satisfying to know that the enchantment which the great adventure cast over his mind was not out-lived. Preparations were gaily in hand for the pending voyage up the Saskatchewan when, still a boy in spirit,

"He kept the old tryst of his people  
With the dark girl Death".

La Verendrye's consummate courage, his invincible purpose, and the glamourie that was in his being carried him immeasurably further than the other adventurers of his time and further than more than two or three of the other adventurers of any time. His graces of mind and person and the vastness of his performance earned for this well-nigh incomparable voyageur to the last syllable of recorded time the love and remembrance of the dwellers in the country of his birth and the lands of his discovering.

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